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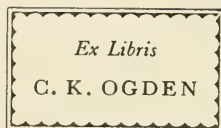
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**THE EARLIER FRENCH MUSICIANS**

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THE EARLIER FRENCH MUSICIANS. By MARY HARGRAVE.





J.<sup>N</sup>. B.<sup>TE</sup>. LULLY.

Ecuyer, Surintendant de la Musique du Roy.

Né à Florence en 1633 Mort à Paris en 1687.

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# THE EARLIER FRENCH MUSICIANS

(1632-1834)

BY  
MARY HARGRAVE

LONDON

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## PREFACE

THE object of this little book is to supply English readers with concise biographies of French Musicians from Lully to the beginning of the 19th century (a period covering about 200 years), reflecting in some measure the conditions and influences of the times in which they lived and worked. Although not all were born on French soil, France was so entirely the land of their adoption that they must be reckoned among her musicians.

For detailed analysis of their works, readers are referred to the Authors mentioned in the Bibliography.





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# THE EARLIER FRENCH MUSICIANS

## CHAPTER I

JEAN BAPTISTE LULLY

1632-1687

JEAN Baptiste Lully,<sup>1</sup> born an Italian, left his native land as a child and identified himself so completely with France and French music that (quite apart from the legal formula of naturalisation) he must be reckoned a French musician. Little is known of his family, and his enemies were probably right in declaring that he was of humble birth. Lulli was a common name at that time in Florence. In or near that city Jean Baptiste was born (29th November, 1632) and baptised on the same day, as was then customary, his parents being one Lorenzo Lulli and Caterina del Sera his wife.

Of his childhood we only know that he loved music and that a monk of the Cordeliers (Grey

<sup>1</sup> He changed Lulli into Lully in France, probably after naturalisation, and all documents signed by him have this spelling.

Friars) taught him the guitar, with a smattering of musical knowledge. Something—perhaps his playing—brought him, a lad of fourteen, to the notice of the Chevalier de Guise, who was travelling through Italy and anxious to find “un joli petit Italien” for his cousin, Mademoiselle de Montpensier, that lady having expressed a wish to practise her Italian. Jean Baptiste was taken, 1646, to France in the Chevalier’s train, but not being sufficiently “joli,” was sent to Mademoiselle’s kitchen. Tradition says that his guitar playing attracted attention and he was presently placed among the musicians of her household; another version has it that he was made “garçon de la chambre de la princesse.” The former sounds more probable, considering Lully’s antecedents, but the legend matters little, save as proving that the boy’s musical gifts were considered extraordinary and secured his promotion; “La guitare l’avait tiré de la marmite,” ran the saying.

At Mademoiselle’s court in the Tuileries there was plenty of music; balls, concerts, serenades, ballets succeeded each other all the year round and Lully found scope for his talents although he only received a meagre salary. The great lady, like other distinguished personages, had her own band of musicians, among them six violins; Lully learnt the violin with his usual quickness and before long was composing airs for this instrument. Here, too, he formed a friendship destined to shape

events in his future life with a singer and composer named Michael Lambert, in Mademoiselle's service and of some repute. Mademoiselle pensioned this singer generously when he left her service, for in fact artists were usually treated very liberally by their rich patrons.

In 1652 Mademoiselle, who had espoused the cause of the Frondeurs, left Paris for the provinces and Lully with the rest of the household accompanied her. But life in the country was not to the young man's taste and Mademoiselle records in her Memoirs: "He would not stay in the country; he asked permission to leave me and I granted it. Since then he has made his way, for he is a great baladin" (dancer of lively airs). Or was it (as the story goes) that the mischievous Lully wrote ribald verses about his protectress and was dismissed in consequence? However that may be, his dismissal was only a further step to advancement, for three months later, behold! Lully at Court, taking part in the *Ballet de la nuit*, actually in five different rôles, and by the following month, March, he had already stepped into the post of *Compositeur de la musique instrumentale*, opportunely vacant through the death of another Italian musician, Lazzarini.

From this time Lully's talents had ample opportunity. He collaborated with Court musicians, danced in ballets, most frequently by the side of the King Louis XIV (at this time a youth of fourteen) and "played the violin divinely" according

to La Viéville. Perhaps at this time it was the young Italian's dancing which especially delighted the Court. He was so agile, so full of droll capers and devices, always ready to "make up" for any rôle, to wear any costume, however fantastic, in short, to do anything likely to amuse. But deeper than all this lay the real goal of Lully's genius, music. Of this he was conscious. By no means was he content to remain simply a fine dancer, a good violinist, a court favourite whose drolleries amused. And before long came the first step towards more serious work.

The Court Musicians formed an orchestra of European reputation known as "les violons du roi" and the twenty-four violinists composing it played dances at all the court balls and fêtes. Lully boldly criticised their performances as too elaborate and artificial, "trop précieuses et tourmentées" (they were, in fact, too full of contrapuntal devices); he advocated a simpler style. The king allowed him to form a smaller band, "les petits violons," whom he trained until they rivalled the others.

Lully's career was one of extraordinary and, as it seems, inevitable success. His lucky star brought him to Court at the precise moment favourable to his type of character and genius, brought him to a king, Louis XIV, who appreciated and protected him from the first: the young musician found a young king of artistic tastes and who loved music especially, more in fact than any other art.

Their natures, too, were congenial; both were Renaissance types, fond of life as well as art, fond of a life of gaiety, gallantry and magnificence. The young king loved to dance (which he did very well) by the side of Lully in the Court ballets. And, what is rarely the case with Court favourites, the monarch remained a faithful friend throughout Lully's life, pardoning his *escapades* and rewarding him with princely generosity. The Grand Monarque always honestly preferred Lully's music to any other. There is a pretty story of his reply in later life (many years later), to an Italian Ambassador, who presented a celebrated violinist to His Majesty. The king listened to the brilliant performance of the *virtuoso*, then ordered one of his own violinists to perform an air by M. Lully. At its close, turning to the Ambassador, he said simply: "Que voulez-vous, Monsieur? *This* is the music I love."

Lully was speedily at home in Court life. His wit and vivacity, his dominant personality, backed by real genius, made him interesting, whilst his caustic tongue was a dreaded weapon if courtiers were inclined to snub.

The Court obviously offered splendid opportunities to artists in those days.

There was the intercourse with fellow musicians, constant rehearsals and productions new and old, an atmosphere of art. More than all these was the invaluable opportunity of trying experiments. A new composition, simple dance or ballet, could be

produced at once and its effect judged under the most favourable conditions. The king himself took the keenest interest in any new composition. Later he was fond of suggesting subjects for opera or pastorale and loved to have a composer under his eye, so to speak, as was the case in after years with Lalande, whom His Majesty would visit every day "to see how he was getting on," a solicitude doubtless embarrassing to its object. Louis could play the lute, the guitar, the harpsichord, and sang very well. He also composed small *Airs*, notably a pretty *courante*. Music was the art he loved best.

In spite of Court duties and pleasures Lully, conscious of deficiencies in his musical education, set himself to study. He found time to work under three different organists (Roberday, Métry, Gigault), studying counterpoint and composition. As regards these teachers, Roberday taught somewhat vaguely that "what pleases the ear should always be accepted as a rule of music" (*the ear being apparently unspecified*). Gigault was fond of using old French songs and chants as themes for fugues. Lully also learnt to play the harpsichord with his usual facility.

On May 30th, 1655, he took part in the ballet *Les Bienvenus* as a dancer, dressed in grotesque costume, but in the following year he composed the music of a long "scène infernale" for the ballet *Psyché*. And after this date his compositions were preferred to all others at Court.



Mademoiselle spoke contemptuously of Lully dancing himself into fame as a "baladin," but she failed to appreciate his real genius. Although his gifts as actor and dancer undoubtedly made him popular, his lasting success was founded on more solid basis. Whatever he undertook, he did well. For instance, when Lully came to Paris, nearly half the musicians were unable to sing or read from score, learning their parts by ear. But Lully insisted that all who came under his *bâton* should learn to read music, and at his death there were very few singers or instrumentalists who were not really proficient in the art of reading at sight.

In a very short time Lully's reputation was established and his life became a constant and broadening stream of success. He collaborated in the various ballets which succeeded each other at Court, such as *L'Amour Malade*, *La Baillerie*, *Alcidiane*, and was universally acclaimed "incomparable."

In other styles he excelled equally, producing (1660) a motet "admirablement harmonique" on the double event of the marriage of the King and the Peace of the Pyrenees. In the same year Mazarin invited the Venetian, Francesco Cavalli to Paris, the Italian master's opera *Xerxès* being performed at Versailles; Lully wrote some ballet music for it. But after his promotion to the post of *Surintendant de la musique*<sup>1</sup> (on the death of an

<sup>1</sup> The Surintendants each served 3-4 months in the year at Court.

old musician named Cambefort) Lully became more markedly French in the style of his music.

Later (in 1666)<sup>1</sup> he showed his predilection for his adopted country by applying for naturalisation in France, a request which was granted in most flattering terms.

The new *Surintendant* still enjoyed performing in the ballets with his usual verve and drollery, and Paris rang with mirth when Lully took the part of "*L'Aveugle*" in the *Ballet de L'Impatience* in the same year. There are pictures of him in all kinds of costumes: as a beggar, as a Turk, as an "Académiste de Chiron," with his face blackened.<sup>2</sup> And he enjoyed life to the full, a life of dissipation and excess, sometimes with episodes of more than doubtful character, until his marriage to some extent acted as a sobering influence. His wife was the only daughter of that Lambert whose acquaintance he had made when in the service of Mademoiselle. The lady brought him a dowry of 20,000 *livres* but a rather unamiable disposition, being somewhat of a scold. Perhaps the union was due to prudence rather than affection—Lully had sound business instincts—but in any case the King was delighted, appointed his favourite "Maître de la musique de la famille royale" with

<sup>1</sup> In 1666 it is worthy of note that the King dismissed all his Italian musicians, perhaps at Lully's instigation, for Lully had set his face against the Italian style of music.

<sup>2</sup> On grand occasions the Court orchestra usually wore a costume in keeping with the Opera to be performed. Lully, for instance, once conducted in Egyptian dress, "but very magnificent."

the sum of 30,000 *livres* to be paid to his heirs, and signed the marriage contract, as did also the Queen Mother, Marie Thérèse, the Duc de Rochecouart, Colbert and other great personages.

Under such auspicious circumstances, at the Church of St. Eustace, 24th July 1662, was solemnized the marriage of Lully the musician, who had come from Florence a poor, unknown lad some twenty years before.

Six children were born, three boys and three girls, within as many years. Their mother devoted herself to her children and home life, she was not fond of society, and Lully, although he does not seem to have been very devoted to her, was certainly less dissipated after his marriage. He presented an edifying spectacle on Sundays, says the chronicle, when he accompanied his family to the Church of St. Roch, sitting in a pew with a door *à clef*.

Whatever Lully's faults, idleness was not one of them; he was an indefatigable worker, and after his marriage he worked harder than ever. He composed unceasingly the ever popular *grand ballets* which contained symphonies, recitatives, airs and dialogues on operatic lines; also religious music such as *Motets* and the beautiful *Miserere* performed at the funeral of Chancelier Séguier (1664), the music of which, Madame de Sévigné declared, could not be surpassed by the music of Heaven.

In 1661 began Lully's collaboration with Molière

in "Comédies ballets," in which dancing and singing enlivened the more serious business of the play. In their first production, *Les Fâcheux*, Lully, however, only took part as an actor in the rôle of an "Augure musicale," the music being by Beauchamp.

But in the next "Comédie ballet," *Le Mariage Forcé*, Lully wrote the music and in the same year (1664) "les deux grands Baptistes," as the two were familiarly styled, produced at the King's request *La Princesse d'Élide*, a great success.

This piece was first performed at the Grand Fêtes given at Versailles (5 May 1664) really in honour of La Vallière. In Paris it was more richly decorated than anything hitherto attempted on the French stage and ran from May through the summer, when Cardinal Chigi visited Paris. In honour of his visit Lully also wrote some music for Corneille's *Oedipe*, which was performed before the Cardinal (August 1664).

*L'Amour médecin*, performed at Versailles (1665) was another triumph for the two Baptistes; although Molière generously attributed its success to the "incomparable M. de Lully." One ballet followed another. There was a constant succession of Court events imperatively demanding musical recognition and Lully was inexhaustible in his occasional inspirations such as the *Ballet de la Naissance de Vénus*, *Ballet de Créquez ou la Triomphe de Bacchus dans les Indes*.

The expiration of the Court mourning for the

death of Anne of Austria (the Queen Mother) inspired a "Comédie ballet" and in this *Ballet des Muses* the versatile Lully himself performed a violin concerto.

For the baptism of the Dauphin (March 1668) he composed a beautiful *Plaudo letare*.

The great Racine also offered to collaborate with Lully and wrote for him *La Chute de Phæton*, 1665.

And during his collaboration with Molière this indefatigable musician found time to compose to *libretti* supplied by Benserade.

The Ballet was not what it is to-day. It contained singing and acting as well as dancing, and from it opera gradually evolved. Mythological subjects were the favourites, in fact almost the only ones. For nearly two hundred years the public never wearied of the *amours* of gods and goddesses, of shepherds, nymphs, fauns, framed in classic landscapes and French Court dress. From the fifteenth to the end of the seventeenth centuries this form of art was popular, a reflection of the classic régime in France, crystallising into rigid operatic conventions which ultimately fell to pieces before the new ideals of the Revolution.

These Ballets, Mascarades or Pastorales, were a series of pictures or slight incidents strung together without any real connecting link.

The *Ballet de la Nuit*, for instance, introduced episodes of thieves, soldiers, the loves of Diana and Endymion and other matter appropriate to the

hours of darkness but not otherwise apparently related.

Subjects like the Four Seasons, the Four Elements also appealed to French musicians with their fondness for descriptive or imitative music. The storms of summer and winter winds were as suggestive as the exploits of Vulcan and Neptune. Lully, for instance, in *Isis* conveys the idea of cold and shivering by repeated notes.

When Lully began to write he kept to the old lines, at first collaborating with other musicians in the Court ballets, then surpassing them by the beauty of his music and improving the whole production.

The Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in the same year (18 July 1668) called forth a "Grand Divertissement de Versailles," in which the *pièce de résistance* was again a comédie ballet, "Georges Dandin" (probably a first version of *Georges Dandin*).

This was performed with more than 100 executants and scored a tremendous success. In the *Grotte de Versailles*, another Pastorale (also performed the same year in the famous grotto of Versailles, a triumph of the "rocailleurs" of the period), nightingales were imitated by a hydraulic organ to the great delight of the Court. Lully's ballet *Flore* was written with Benserade (13 February 1669) and the King danced in this ballet (February 1669), whilst in October of the same year Lully played the part of *Il Signor Chiacche-*

rone in the scene between two Italian musicians in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*. In these two productions Lully had greatly developed the musical side, so much so that in the latter the music took first place in public estimation, Lully being considered of more importance than Molière. Yet another Pastorale, *Les Amants Magnifiques* (4 February 1670). About this time an Envoy from the Porte visited Paris, with a resulting vogue for everything "exotique," and especially Turkish. Molière and Lully at once met the demand by a "Turquerie," and in the "Bourgeois Gentilhomme" (1670) the chief scene was a "Cérémonie turque," in which Lully, in a strange and wonderful costume, took the part of the Mufti. Great expenses were incurred in the production of this "bouffonerie," no pains being spared to secure local colour. The costumes alone cost 12,000 livres (about £600) and the whole Court production four times as much. But this extravagance was justified by success. The King was delighted and never wearied of the performance. It is said that when Lully incurred His Majesty's displeasure by some particularly scandalous exploit he would contrive to play this part in order to dispense the clouds on the brow of "le roi soleil." And many years later, when Lully had slept a quarter of a century in his imposing tomb and Madame de Maintenon had banished gaiety from the Court, the old King commanded music of the *Turquerie* to be played again, as if trying to recall



former joyous days. Several Pastorales were written before the break with Molière.

*Psyché* (1671), a tragi-comedy, in which both Molière and Corneille collaborated, was a great success and had a three months' run.

*Pomone* in the same year, also a success.

Unfortunately, however, the two great Baptistes quarrelled; there are different versions of the reason, but probably Lully's grasping, domineering character gave sufficient cause. Molière found his theatrical venture at the Palais Royal seriously hampered by Lully's despotic powers of limiting the number of musicians to be employed, and he joined certain operatic directors in legal protest against Lully's privileges. But they were powerless against the favourite of the King.

The enormous amount of work accomplished by Lully is partly accounted for by collaboration.

It was customary for composers to sketch the outline, the melody of their works, indicating the harmony and then leaving the middle parts to be filled in by their pupils or by other musicians, much as painters allowed their pupils to fill in backgrounds, etc. These *Ripieni* were used in chorus and orchestral parts, collaboration being acknowledged in such terms as "M. Colasse wrote the accompaniments." Lully was not fond of ornaments and *fioritura* in his vocal music and often left these to be written by Lambert, his father-in-law. In fact there was a good deal of collaboration, which accounts for the great amount



of operatic music turned out to order and at short notice.

Lully found a new librettist in Quinault, a mild poet who submitted to his bullying and caprices. Quinault was engaged by contract to write one opera a year at an annual salary of 4,000 livres (about £200), but during their fourteen years partnership the two produced quite twenty works.

Their first joint production, *Les fêtes de l'amour et de Bacchus* (1672) was not a success, the music being really a *pot pourri* of dance tunes composed by Lully for the King's ballets, no plot. But noblemen deigned to dance in it at Court, and among them the Duke of Monmouth, who was visiting Paris at the time.

*Cadmus et Hermione*, "tragédie en musique"<sup>1</sup> (1673) pleased the Court greatly and was honoured by the presence of the King, Monsieur and Mademoiselle. The "Allégorie" of the serpent "Python" in the Prologue was especially admired and a criticism in the "Gazette Rimée" contains nothing but praise, somewhat naïvely expressed by a poetical critic:

" Cette aimable symphonie sans nul bruit de cacophonie."

*Cadmus et Hermione* is really Lully's first serious attempt at opera in contra-distinction to his

<sup>1</sup> " Tragédie " was really drama, not tragedy in our sense of the word. " Comédie " dealt with probable or possible happenings, whilst Opera was at first confined to supernatural or mythological subjects.

Pastorales and Ballets, and some account of it may be of interest.<sup>1</sup> The characters are a curious medley, including giants, heroes, a Python, soldiers, rural deities, chorus of winds in the air and subterranean winds, ten golden statues animated by Love. The distribution of voices seems peculiar according to our ideas, the hero being a bass or low baritone, whilst Hermione's nurse was sung by a male voice, the same singer taking also the rôle of a Tyrian Prince. It was customary at that time for the parts of old women or women supplying "comic relief" to be performed by men, a tradition still maintained in our pantomime.

The Prologue (which was of great importance) opens with rustic revels, in the midst of which Envy emerges from a cave in the centre of the stage. Then the terrible Python (a fore-runner of Fafnir) appears from a marshy swamp (*marais bourbeux*) in the background. The flames issuing from his mouth and eyes supply the only light in the darkened theatre. Simple (very simple) running passages accompany the Winds, whilst Envy sings a *recitative*, until fiery darts from above strike the Python, who falls writhing into his *marais bourbeux*. A Gavotte celebrates the triumph of the Sun, in whom intelligent courtiers recognised the Roi Soleil. The story of Cadmus and Hermione followed.

1 The first French opera was Cambert's *Pomone*, but Cambert had not Lully's success. He came to England and became Court Musician to Charles II (1672).

Throughout the opera the tonality changes very little, which makes for a depressing monotony of effect; there is little rhythmic interest. The *recitative* is often fine although unduly long, and some of the airs are beautiful. It is recorded that a droll effect was produced at one performance by a singer, a vivacious and greatly admired lady. She was in the rôle of Pallas and, on being applauded, rose and made a graceful bow from her cloud, taking off her helmet and allowing her beautiful blonde hair to flow loosely about her shoulders to the delight of the public.

*Cadmus et Hermione* was produced 28 April 1673 and on the following day the appreciative monarch gave tangible proof of his satisfaction by granting Lully the right of performing his works in the Salle du Palais Royal where Molière's troupe had played and where, during a performance of his "Malade Imaginaire" poor Molière had breathed his last only two months before.

Lully was now absolute dictator in matters musical, not only in Paris but throughout the kingdom. Already in 1672 he had obtained the right of directing the Académie Royale de Musique, i.e. the Opera (practically an Opera Syndicate), the former director, Perrin, having failed financially.

Lully started it on a fresh basis, and Letters Patent conferred on him most arbitrary powers as Director of Opera. He was allowed to close a rival theatre in the rue Mazarine. He could pro-

✓hibit actors from employing more than two voices and six violins and henceforth no opera could be performed throughout the whole of France without Lully's permission, for which of course he charged.<sup>1</sup> His authority was absolute and supreme in all matters of music.

*Alceste* brought new triumphs, though not without dissentient voices. Madame de Sévigné was extremely enthusiastic and declared that this would surpass all Lully's previous works. The King had said, if he were in Paris when this opera was performed he should go every day. "These words are worth a hundred thousand livres to Bap-tiste" comments the astute lady. Again a few days before the first performance she wrote: "The Opera is a marvel of beauty, there are passages in the music which move me to tears. I am not alone in being overwhelmed, the soul of Madame de la Fayette, too, was troubled." But in spite of these sensitive vibrations of cultured ladies, sterner critics condemned the work. Musicians disapproved of the music. Poets said that Quinault had spoilt Euripedes by introducing unnecessary episodes<sup>2</sup> and ribald verse alluded to "musique de chien" and "musique de diable." La Fon-

1 He received 2,000 livres (francs) per annum from a Director of Opera at Marseilles, for instance.

2 Many critics disapproved of Quinault's verses. There is a story that Lully's admirers once at a supper advanced threateningly on him with raised glasses, shouting in mock-heroic chorus, "Abandon Quinault or thou art a dead man."

taine, who was annoyed because Lully had refused his libretto of *Daphne*, wrote a skit, "Le Florentin," in which he compared Lully to a wolf. In short it was evident that the favourite of fortune had many enemies.

There was even a report that a librettist named Guichard, a gentleman in the household of the Duc d'Orléans, had plotted to poison Lully by means of snuff containing arsenic. Such devices were common enough in those days. Lully appealed to the King for protection against his enemies and the King told him to bring an action against Guichard. The affair dragged on for three years, involving many scandals, but in the end Guichard was acquitted. He had, however, lost his post in the service of the Duc d'Orléans and left Paris.

Lully was fond of property and apparently of building houses.

In 1670, having bought land, he borrowed money from Molière (they were working together at the time on the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*), to the amount of 11,000 livres at a fair rate of interest and built himself a house. It was a fine large building, (still standing at the corner of the rue Sainte-Anne and the rue des Petits Champs), with all the appointments suitable to a rich man, a stable for three horses, etc., and in it Lully lived for some years. Not long after this occurred the unfortunate breach with Molière.

Later Lully bought a country house at Sèvres. Another dwelling he shared with his father-in-law,

Lambert, at Puteaux. Finally in 1683 he retired to another house which he had built in Ville l'Evesque (now 28 rue Boissy d'Anglas). This last home was in the midst of a large quiet garden. Here he composed his three latest operas (*Roland*, *Armide*, *Acis et Galathée*) and here he died.

Attempts to collaborate with Racine and Boileau failed, owing doubtless to Lully's exacting, domineering character. Not one of the three poets, Racine, Boileau, La Fontaine, could satisfy him. He made his librettists write, alter, re-write continually. For *Bellérophon* Corneille and Fontenelle wrote over 2,000 lines, of which Lully only accepted about 200.

*Atys*, libretto by the docile Quinault, was performed (1676) and delighted the Court. Madame de Sévigné was again in raptures: "There are passages of extreme beauty; a 'Slumber' and 'Dreams' of surprising originality. The symphony is entirely in the bass strings and of such drowsy beauty that one admires Baptiste under a new aspect."

*Isis* (1677) was not quite so successful; the public condemned it as "too learned," the instrumental part being developed at too great sacrifice of the vocal.

Moreover Quinault, having incurred the displeasure of Madame de Montespan by a pointed allusion to her in this work, had to disappear for a time from Paris, depriving Lully of his librettist.

For a time Thomas Corneille wrote for him, re-

modelling the *Psyche* of 1671 into an opera, which with new music by Lully had some success (April 19 1678).

Then followed *Bellérophon*,<sup>1</sup> composed more slowly than usual, for Lully was ill at the time, and performed in the following year (31 January 1679). This was a greater success than any hitherto achieved. All Paris flocked to hear it and the Court honoured it by repeated visits. The King insisted on encoring all the most beautiful passages each time he attended the performance, even during the following year, when *Bellérophon* was performed at St. Germain (5 February 1680). The music was beautiful, the staging a triumph. The scene of the Elysian Fields designed by a Court artist was especially admired as a marvel of melancholy beauty.

In spite of the critics *Alceste* was performed at the Grand Fêtes given at Versailles in the summer of 1674 with the lavish splendour beloved of "le Roi Soleil." This opera and *Cadmus et Hermione* were produced in the marble court (open air), lighted by tall candelabra of silver placed along the sides of the court among rows of orange trees in silver tubs. The King's chair was placed on a platform with seats for the courtiers. The Palace and the lakes were illuminated, the fountains played through coloured lights, there were magnificent fireworks. Splendid collations were served

<sup>1</sup> Thos. Corneille and Fontenelle, librettists.



in leafy arbours, the tables lighted by thousands of candles in candelabra of silver, with the rarest fruits and flowers in gold and silver dishes.

After listening to the Opera or a play by Racine or Molière the King and his Court would promenade until dawn or embark in flower-wreathed gondolas on the lake. Such were the Fêtes of the classic days of Versailles in which the Roi Soleil strove to capture all the beauty and joy of life. La Vallière's star was no longer in the ascendant. These Fêtes were in honour of Madame de Montespan. But the splendour and magnificence were always the same. Lully was always the idolised musician. At yet another Grand Fête the opera was his famous *Roland* (1685).

The weather in that summer being rainy and the Marble Court impossible, the *manège* (riding school) was transformed in a few hours into an Opera house, lest the King should be disappointed. At noon horses were exercising in the *manège*, by evening it had been transformed into a splendid theatre with raised platform for His Majesty, seats for spectators, the usual brilliant candelabra, a stage embowered in orange trees, groves of other trees lining the walls, . . . such were the resources of Versailles.

Versailles the magnificent, the lordly pleasure-house, built at such fearful cost of money and human life, whose upkeep was the despair of Colbert, was the Earthly Paradise in which Louis XIV loved to forget earthly cares. His ideal was



an enchanted spot in which he could realise all beauty, natural and artistic, sculpture, painting, music—above all music—gardens of rare trees and exotic flowers, beautiful women and a glittering court. “Surtout beaucoup de fleurs” was always his command, “mais de fleurs tardives ou avancées,” a characteristic touch, for His Majesty took no delight in ordinary flowers, he must have exotics or flowers forced out of their season: tuberoses, Dutch tulips, orange blossoms; and the potted plants in the parterres must be changed every day, sometimes twice a day, lest their monotony should weary the eye of the royal aesthete.<sup>1</sup> Debt troubled him little. The discomfort of courtiers crowded in dark corners behind the magnificent exterior troubled him not at all. Outward splendour marking dirt and misery made Versailles the characteristic symbol of the period.

But the Grand Fêtes dazzled all beholders. In all some eight or nine of these wonderful Fêtes were given between 1663-1674, the first in honour of La Vallière, that of 1674 to celebrate Mme. de Montespan. Lully was always the chief director as well as the great composer of these *divertissements*. He was indispensable and Louis XIV realised it, he was terribly afraid of losing “a man of such talent as M. de Lully,” a man who understood the art of splendid amusement. Besides, Lully’s genius celebrated “le Roi Soleil” and his achievements. The conquering hero who kills the

<sup>1</sup> E. Lavisse, *Histoire de France*.

Python, the benevolent Majesty adored by his people was always "le Roi Soleil," the hero of wars, victories, glories, etc. His Majesty often suggested points which he wished especially to emphasise, such as the snub to Madame de Montespan (for which Quinault suffered), when she had bored him with jealousy about the Comtesse de Ludes. Everyone recognised Mme. de Montespan in the jealous Juno who persecutes the charming nymph Isis.

Emerging from his temporary eclipse in connection with this affair, Quinault wrote *Proserpine* (1679), over which Madame de Sevigné again waxed enthusiastic, proclaiming "This opera surpasses all the others." Certain more critical Lullystes, however, betrayed weariness of this style and clamoured for something different.

"Lully, donne-moi d'autres tons  
Ou bien je me retire."

The Court at St. Germain was greatly pleased with a ballet *Triomphe de l'Amour* (21 January 1681), in which several great personages took part, the *clou* being Mademoiselle de Nantes, a young lady not quite eight years of age,<sup>1</sup> who danced with castenets to the delight of all beholders.

This was presented to the general public in Paris (6th May 1681) and charmed every one.

<sup>1</sup> Daughter of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan.

Unusual interest was excited by the fact that women danced in this ballet for the first time instead of being represented by male dancers. The innovation had already found favour at Court, where ladies of quality delighted to dance in these performances.<sup>1</sup>

As for *Psyché*, the King was never weary of the music of this (almost) opera. A curious instance of the taste of the period: His Majesty ordered some of the airs to be performed at Dunkirk when the city ramparts were completed. Besides stringed instruments the orchestra was augmented by pipes, hautbois, military trumpets and 700 drums; further, a salute of 80 cannons precisely on the final chord. The effect on the audience was one of "joy mingled with terror."

Lully now took an extraordinarily bold step, begging the King to give him a post of Royal secretary (*charge de secrétaire*) a post usually reserved for noblemen. His request was promptly granted, greatly to the disgust of the other high officials, who snubbed the musician, but were obliged to receive him in their ranks.

His only recommendation was that he made people laugh, said Louvois contemptuously. To which Lully retorted, "You would be glad enough to do the same, if you could!" There were only two men in the kingdom, M. le Maréchal de la

<sup>1</sup> Members of the nobility were even permitted to sing and dance in Opera without prejudice to "their titles of nobility, privileges, rights and immunities."

Feuillade and Lully, who dared to reply to M. de Louvois so insolently, says Viéville.

On the day of his reception in the "Chancellerie" (Seal Office) Lully, with his accustomed love of display, gave a splendid banquet to the most important of his new colleagues and further invited all the "Chancellerie en corps" to a grand performance at the Opera. History does not say how these gentlemen enjoyed the performance, but records that they sat through it, two or three rows of serious gentlemen in black cloaks and large felt hats, listening with becoming gravity to the Minuets and Gavottes of "their Colleague, the Musician." (December 29th 1681).

*Persée* (by Quinault) was performed in Paris (17th April 1682) and repeated at Versailles in July of the same year. Here it was performed in the Riding School, again hastily transformed in a few hours into a theatre, a grassy lawn for carpet. The King considered it very fine, saying that the music was beautiful throughout, he had never heard an opera in which the music kept uniformly at so high a level.

*Persée* was undeniably a glorification of His Majesty's exploits. But everywhere it scored triumphant success and at a gratuitous performance, which Lully gave to celebrate the birth of the Duc de Bourgogne, crowds flocked through a triumphal arch at the entrance, whilst wine flowed from a public fountain until midnight. *Persée* remained a favourite opera, being still on the ré-

pertoire as late as 1746. It was an opera which made great demands on scenic machinery. Efforts at flying machines succeeded fairly well after several experiments had been made, and "vols" were successfully carried out.

An opera by Lully was always an event. The Rue St. Honoré was lined with carriages at each performance, and poorer citizens made an effort to procure seats. La Fontaine wrote:—

" Il a l'or de l'abbé, du brave, du commis,  
La coquette s'y fait mener par ses amis,  
L'officier, le marchand tout son rôti retranche  
Pour y pouvoir porter tout son gain le Dimanche."

and

" Le français pour lui seul contraignant sa nature  
N'a que pour l'opéra de passion qui dure."<sup>1</sup>

Some part of this passion for Opera was due to the popular delight in the dramatic action of the plot and in magnificent scenic effects, which surpassed anything hitherto put upon the stage. The spectators were open-eyed as well as open-eared, naïve crowds who with childish delight absorbed the wonderful stories of mythological heroes, the novel stage devices, as well as Lully's music. Viéville relates " When Armide prepares to stab Renaud, I have twenty times seen all the spectators hold their breath from fear, motionless, their souls all

<sup>1</sup> " He has gold from the Abbé, the Soldier the Clerk, the Coquette persuades her admirers to take her, the officer and the merchant economise on their dinner in order to go to the Opera on Sunday. The Frenchman, contrary to his nature, remains faithful—to opera alone." (Roughly translated).

eyes and ears until the violin air which finishes the scene relaxed the tension, permitting them to breathe again, breathe with a murmur of joy and admiration." It was the same at Court. What wonder, when even the intellectual Madame de Sévigné wept over the sorrows of Alceste or Roland! Lully interprets his age, the "Grand Siècle" which loved heroic sentiment, gallantry, magnificent display, voluptuous imagery. His own nature revelled in these things, for he was a true child of his age, fortunately born in his right century. His own house was full of *objets de luxe*: pictures, mirrors, plate, diamonds; he was rich and loved to spend lavishly, extravagantly, living in the "grand" manner, a prince among artists. Such was Lully, the man of his age.

*Phæton*, again by Quinault (as were also the next three operas) was another "succès fou" both at Versailles (6th Jan. 1683) and in Paris (23rd April, the same year). The subject required magnificent and difficult staging and all Paris flocked to see it, but also to hear the music. It was known as the "People's Opera," and some of the airs were sung in the streets. Unfortunately, a brilliant run was cut short by the death of the Queen, which was announced one evening just as the Overture was beginning.

*Amadis* (18th Jan. 1684) contains the beautiful "Bois épais," whose beauty is still recognised. It is interesting to know that Lully himself was fond of this work.

*Roland* was a subject suggested by the King, one which did not appeal to the public. The music, however, became extremely popular and airs from it, notably the "rages de Roland," were sung everywhere. As the Court was still in mourning, only selections from the Opera were performed at Versailles (18th Jan. 1685), but it was fully staged at Paris in the following March. Lully considered ✓ this his best music. Roland was the warrior who, finding his love has deserted him for a rival, tears up trees and hurls down rocks in a mad rage, until a gentle spirit, Logistille, soothes him and persuades him to return to war and its glories.

*Armide*, written during a severe illness, performed in Paris, 15th Feb. 1686, was again a real success with the public. The Grand Dauphin, who adored Lully's music, came to Paris on purpose to hear *Armide*. But the presence of the King was lacking to complete the triumph. Lully was deeply hurt and expressed his disappointment quite pathetically in the Dedication published with *Armide* in the same year.

"Sire, of all the tragedies I have set to music, this is the one which has pleased the public most. Crowds flock to see it and never has a work been more applauded. Yet I esteem it the least happy of my compositions, since it has not enjoyed the privilege of appearing before your Majesty. At your command, Sire, I worked with care and zeal in spite of a sudden and dangerous attack of illness, and the ardent wish to complete it during the



period desired by your Majesty rendered me oblivious to the dangers of illness and the pains I suffered. But of what use, Sire, such efforts at haste in offering you these new strains? Your Majesty was not able to hear them (*sa majesté ne s'est pas trouvée en état*) and only took pleasure in my music as it served to please your subjects."

But *Armide* was the greatest success since *Bel-lérophon*. People wept at emotional passages and declared Act V. to be Lully's greatest work. This was Quinault's<sup>1</sup> last libretto; he wrote a poetic farewell to opera, and to his "muse tendre," as if presaging the end of his work, and courted a more austere muse with a poem on "L'extinction de l'Hèrèsie."

A last "pastorale herôique" (words by Campistron) was written at royal command for the visit of the Grand Dauphin to the Castle of Anet. This was *Acis et Galathée*, a charmingly fresh and original work, which remained on the operatic répertoire for nearly 100 years (until 1782).

For its first performance (6th Sept. 1682) Lully went to Anet with his singers, dancers and musicians, and was treated during his stay there with the greatest respect, being served at table exactly like other noble guests; in fact, a special maître d'hôtel was appointed to attend to his wants. "There was always good company gathered round his table," says the *Mercure*, "either to eat or to talk with M. de Lully during the repast, for his

<sup>1</sup> He survived Lully only one year, dying 26th November 1688.



conversation is no less entertaining than his music."

Another big popular success was scored when this Pastorale was produced at the Palais Royal three weeks later (Sept. 1686).

Lully's triumphant career might have run on for many years longer had not death cut it short when he was still in the prime of life, busy as ever and full of new projects after his recovery from the recent illness. He was at work on a new opera, *Achille et Polixène* (with Campistron as librettist), but the first act was still unfinished when the King fell dangerously ill. France was full of rejoicings at his recovery towards the end of the year. Lully manifested his joy by a *Te Deum* which was sung at his own expense (8th Jan. 1687) at the Feuillants in the Rue st. Honoré. More than 150 singers and musicians took part in it and "in order to show his zeal," says the chronicler, Lully conducted himself. But in his enthusiasm he injured his foot by striking it sharply with the *bâton*. A small swelling appeared, which spread rapidly; blood poisoning supervened.

Lully would not agree to the amputation suggested by his doctor. A quack was called in who made matters worse. A characteristic story is told of how Lully was persuaded by a priest to burn the score of the opera on which he was busy, (*Achille et Polixène*). Afterwards, feeling better, he received some friends, among them a young

prince who reproached him for having destroyed such music.

"How foolish, Baptiste, to believe a dreaming Jansenist and burn such beautiful music!"

"Peace, peace, Monseigneur!" whispered the dying man, "I have another copy."

But in spite of his gay humour, when he felt death really approaching, Lully energetically and dramatically repented of his sins in ashes and with a cord round his neck "*avec une édification parfaite.*"

With businesslike interest in this world and the next he sent for the notary on March 10th and gave exact orders about his funeral, ordering a perpetual mass for the repose of his soul and many other things. His operatic rights he bequeathed to his wife and his son, Jean Louis, jointly, and willed his wife also to have the direction of the Académie Royale de Musique, assisted by a friend and a secretary. Twelve days later, March 22nd, Lully died at Ville l'Evesque in his large canopied bed, and was interred with due pomp and ceremony at the church of Les Augustins Petits Pères, after a service at the Madeleine. His family erected a sumptuous monument to his memory in the chapel of his patron saint, St. Jean Baptiste, a monument in black and white marble by Michel Cotton : two female figures representing light and dramatic music and above these the characteristic bust of Lully by Antoine Coysevox. His enemies expressed disgust at such

display, but there were friends, we read, who wept sincerely the loss of "Baptiste."

A more modest tribute to Baptiste's popularity was a verse sung to the air of the *Rigaudon* in *Acis et Galatée*:

"Baptiste est mort,  
Adieu la Symphonie;  
La musique est finie,  
Déplorons son sort."<sup>1</sup>

"A very ugly little man," he is described, "and extremely careless in his dress. One scarcely saw his small red-lidded eyes, and they, too, scarcely saw anything, but their sombre fire, expressed great intelligence and a great deal of mischief (malice); his whole face was in fact grotesque, bizarre." Other writers note his large nose, large mouth, thick sensual lips, a face full of lines, bushy eyebrows, and extremely short-sighted eyes. He wore a thick wig, not over clean, and was always covered with snuff. He composed at his harpsichord, snuff-box at one end of the instrument, whose notes, stained and dirty, bore witness to his inveterate use of the same.

Lully was probably never very strong physically, in spite of his extraordinary energy and will power, and his excesses in living, no less than incessant hard work, undermined his constitution. Although

<sup>1</sup> "Baptiste is dead,  
Farewell to Symphony,  
Music is at an end;  
Let us weep her fate."

dissipated and fond of riotous living, he was on the whole a good husband and father—"at any rate not a bad one," says Lecerf, dispassionately. He found a congenial soul in Mademoiselle Certin, a celebrated Claveciniste, who delighted the Court as well as all Paris by her concerts. She had many admirers; even La Fontaine wrote verses in her honour.

Of Lully's children, three had a share of musical talent, but not one inherited their father's genius. Perhaps he had hopes of one son especially, for he gave him a good musical education, but there was no real gift. The two sons, Jean and Jean Louis, were evidently not equal to the task of completing Lully's unfinished ballet, "*Les Saisons*," which was done by Colasse, only the ballets in it being by Lully. His eldest son, Louis, was a great disappointment, weak in mind and character to such a degree that he had to be placed under restraint with the monks at Charenton.

Lully was generous to his children, giving his daughter, Catherine Madeleine, a handsome dowry when she married Nicolas de Francini, Maître d'Hotel du Roi. To this son-in-law he gave up most of his own duties at the opera, only retaining the artistic direction himself. He made his sons liberal allowances, and in his will he remembered all who had served him. Lully was not miserly, as his enemies declared; although he was fond of money, it was not to hoard, but to spend lavishly. He certainly amassed a very considerable fortune,

leaving 800,000 livres (francs), also about 44,000 francs' worth of plate and 35,000 frs. of diamonds.

His was a versatile genius. He could write verse, especially in comic vein, was never at a loss for repartee or joke, could tell a story in capital style, with an Italian dramatic touch which never forsook him. No wonder he was an amusing companion. Le Roi Soleil found Baptiste quite indispensable to his happiness. Foreign monarchs also smiled on Monsieur de Lully, gave him rich presents and honoured him with their portraits.

A career so amazingly, phenomenally fortunate as Lully's naturally excited envy. Enemies laid to his charge a terrible list of vices of all kinds. Undeniably he had many serious faults, was profligate, selfish, greedy of money and possessions, unscrupulous in his ambition, overbearing . . . . All these, and worse, defects became a legend encrusting his memory. Later generations, remembering the distorted vision of contemporaries, have learnt to discount many of these accusations. Whatever Lully's faults, he had friends at home as well as at Court. Incidents such as his remembrance of all his servants in his will show at least a kindly nature. Or he would seek to atone for an unusual outburst of bad temper at rehearsal by inviting the long-suffering musicians to supper.

Nor does it appear that he kept his position as Court favourite by flattery and servility; he had a caustic tongue for high and low alike. Once on being reproached for keeping the King waiting,

Lully said drily: "He is the Master, he can wait."

He gave the Court something precious, enlivening its costly boredom by his genius and wit, gave splendour of genius to wealth, besides being "bon camarade" to them all, musicians, princes and courtiers.

"Baptiste, fais-nous rire," implored the laughter-loving Parisians.

But Baptiste was not merely a laughter-provoking comedian. His *Bois épais*, for instance, is on quite different lines; its tender, solemn beauty is still felt.

A vital, original nature, one who makes the flame of life flicker more brightly, makes his fellows live more intensely, is always precious. And this was Lully. His flame of life burned always brightly, ardently; his genius illumined a King and his period.

Lully wrote easily, although he had to wait sometimes for inspiration. If it came in the night he would rise and go to his harpsichord to capture the idea at once. He would read a scene which he wished to interpret in music again and again until he had it by heart and, when inspiration finally came, would rush to his harpsichord, sing and play until he had both melody and harmony perfect. Three months' work at an opera generally sufficed; he then had the whole conception so firmly in his mind that he could dictate it to his secre-

tary. When composing he seemed literally possessed by music and at all times rhythms and melodies flowed at the merest suggestion, such as the trot of a horse, the step of a dance. If he took up a guitar, his fingers at once began to improvise courantes, minuets, gigues, most of which he never troubled to write down. Even if a violin, an instrument which he never really loved, was lying about, he would take it up and play for hours. In composing opera he often wrote several versions of a scene and, after choosing one, would tell his secretary carelessly to burn the others. His genius loved simple, clear, firm outlines, a graceful melodic line, made as expressive as possible with the simplest accompaniment. Quite early, as we have seen, his instinct led him to reject the over-elaborate music of the "violons du roi." He had, in fact, the instinct of the Modern of his age, the revolt against the stereotyped contrapuntal devices of the old school and the feeling for the concentrated, expressive, harmonic basis of the New.

He was extremely severe with his artists, insisting upon good rhythm, vigour and clearness of *attaque*, points in which his Palais Royal orchestra of forty executants excelled; his musicians were famous throughout Europe. He trained his singers to sing without dragging, especially in *recitative*, whilst he instructed both actors and singers in deportment; how to walk on and present themselves. In the ballet he invented what he called "pas d'expression," expressive steps, and was able to illus-



trate by his own performance what he wished. His music contains minute directions as to expression, e.g., "Very softly, almost without touching the strings," etc.

Artists, singers, dancers and instrumentalists all obeyed this energetic, despotic *maestro*, so all powerful as well as so exacting, who ruled them with a rod of iron and Viéville, recalling his régime, says regretfully: "I warrant that under Lully's sway the lady singers would not have colds half the year, nor would the gentlemen be drunk four times a week." For alas! no sooner was the great man dead than the musical edifice he had erected so carefully began to crumble away. Ten years later the instrumentalists were considered "poor," the singers shrieked, the orchestra played out of time and tune, and everyone lamented the loss of Baptiste.

But his compositions, his operas held their own for more than a century. Later generations declared that music had only begun with Lully, before him it had been "gothique," barbarous and crude. His *Armide* was pronounced the finest work the world had seen since Nero's day! French 17th century music was in fact represented by Lully, the Italian who so completely identified himself with France.

Not only in Paris and the provinces was Lully a cult; beyond French frontiers his works were acclaimed, in Italy, Holland, Flanders, in the chief northern courts. *Armide* was performed in Rome



in 1690. His influence was felt by musicians in Italy, Germany, England, from the Italian Teobaldi di Gatti to Fischer and even Bach. Purcell learnt much from Humphrey, a pupil of Lully, and Haendel also adopted some of the French master's methods.

And when Rameau came, he found a terrible rival in his great predecessor, still supremely in possession of the field, as he had been in his brilliant lifetime. Lully had become a musical dogma, and he, who in his lifetime had sought new channels, had become in his turn an obstacle for others. He was a Classic and a Classic of extraordinary tenacity. Even Gluck had to fight the tradition which had become a national obsession. For so long every new composer had copied Lully. They had written tempests, "bruits de guerre," rages, "sommeils" in his style and imitated his *recitative* slavishly. Even Gluck, in his first works, copied Lully.

And not only did musicians admit his superiority, his music was popular with ordinary folk. No artist was ever more universally admired, both during his lifetime and afterwards. Viéville declares that the air, "Amour, que veux-tu de moi" (*Amadis*) was sung by every cook in France and Lully would stop his carriage on the Pont Neuf to set some poor fiddler right who was playing one of his airs. The severely hostile Arnould deplored (in 1694) that "the poison of songs by Quinault and Lulli had spread all through France."

✓ Lully's opera, like Versailles, was very artificial. Under him it became stereotyped and fixed, so that no innovations could be attempted. The form had crystallised and could not be changed without breaking.

✓ There was the Overture, a slow movement, dignified and heavy, then a fugue followed by another short, slow passage. Then the Prologue with chorus, singing, dances, recitative, dealing with mythological and allegorical subjects. The Overture is repeated after this. The drama proper following all this is a long, loosely woven plot on which are strung dances, especially rustic dances, scenes with chorus. Such descriptive passages as "Slumbers," "Furies," "Storms," "Battles," were all modelled on the same patterns, a stereotyped form of descriptive art.

✓ The subjects of Lully's operas were, moreover, not spontaneous but greatly revised works of art. Often the King chose or suggested the subject. Quinault (or another librettist) would put it into shape, entirely under Lully's direction however. Finally it was submitted to the Académie Française, so that the Opera was really in some sense National Opera. His Majesty followed the composition of the music with equal interest, scene by scene, had the airs sung to him, attended rehearsals (which were at Versailles or St. Germain), and gave his advice. In the same way he would order of Lalande, a court musician who wrote chiefly religious music, a number of "little pieces" and

would insist on hearing these at all stages of their evolution.<sup>1</sup>

Lully's chief form of composition was of course opera, but he composed religious music, too, especially in later years, when the King's thoughts turned to piety under the influence of Madame de Maintenon and advancing years. And in his religious music Lully showed sincere religious feeling. He had moments of mystic exaltation in spite of his worldliness. He drew a sharp distinction between secular and religious music and was scandalised one day at church on hearing music adapted from one of his operas used at Mass. There was a story that he prayed aloud: "O Lord, forgive this error, I did not intend this music for Thee."

His *Miserere* (written about 1664) on the text of the Psalm is beautiful and impressive. In it he employed Perpendicular Harmony, obtaining massive effects, and heightening the expression by bold modulations. The voices, alone or combined, are generally only supported by *basso continuo*, but in

<sup>1</sup> Louis XIV lived in music, or, at any rate, his life had a constant musical accompaniment. He had music at table, at church, when playing cards, walking, hunting, in the country or in town. In his private apartments of an evening he would hear acts of operas or "petits concerts," at which he sometimes sang himself. If an air took his fancy, he would hum or sing it incessantly, sometimes, Mme. de Maintenon complained, "when the words were not at all suitable." Not only the Court and the City, the whole kingdom was fond of music. Lully's airs were sung by high and low, played at street corners and on the Pont Neuf. Opera was performed at Lyons, Marseilles, Montpellier by travelling companies, and there were several provincial Opera Houses.

the grand chorus violins double the vocal part (a usual device at that period). To quote M. de la Laurencie, in the *Finale*, "Lully expresses all the religious emotion of the text, all its fear and hope. Sorrowfully the alto sings 'Amplius lava me,' a fervent prayer in which the sinner's despair is felt. At the words, 'Et in peccatis concepit me,' a series of 7ths on a diatonically descending bass seem to retreat in shame. The full chorus, although massive and heavy, retains its polyphonic suppleness; this is perceptible in the restless movement of the ten parts in 'Docebo iniquos,' in which heavy masses of voices are hurled from all sides, crashing on the word 'impii.' "

It is difficult for us at this distance of time to distinguish the exact shades of difference between Lully's style of music and that of his contemporaries, but in his day those differences were recognised. Music was changing from the Polyphonic to the Harmonic system. The former still flourished in organ music, but there was no vigorous young school of moderns to take its place. But Lully, when quite a youth, instinctively rejected the old elaborate contrapuntal devices and always used them sparingly. He always disliked over-elaboration and his "Surtout pas de broderies" was constantly directed against singers and instrumentalists who were fond of introducing "ornaments." He wrote with greater simplicity, with more distinct rhythm and melodic line than his contemporaries. To quote M. Henri Prunières, Lully

“ put a stop to the wearisome loquacity of composers afflicted with chronic fugue and a bad habit of talking incessantly when they had nothing to say. He allowed a musical idea to free itself from traditional forms and express itself more naturally. Such a revolution was not entirely the work of one man, it is true, but Lully had a large share in it; he was so greatly admired that other musicians followed his example and imitated his methods.”

In his operas Lully employed very simple harmonies, only occasionally a 7th or 9th by way of relief. Musical critics of his day admired his clever use of discords, sometimes, however, reproving him for not resolving them properly. It is amusing to find critics of that day anticipating, in this respect, critics of Wagner; the discord has always been an object of solicitude.

The orchestra of the period was small and its effects were not varied by judicious blending of different instruments. Lully has duos of flutes, trios of oboes, airs for violins, occasionally an *ensemble* of wood-wind, brass and strings, contrasting with other instruments, but he makes no experiments in blending different timbres. There were conventions with regard to the use of instruments. Flutes were proper for “effets nocturnes et élégiaques,” for tender laments, also as heralds of approaching amorous divinities, as a kind of *leit motiv* in fact. Rustic songs and dances demanded the oboe. Trumpets of course sounded “War Alarms” and Marches. Violins accom-

panied "Slumbers" and also (in rapid movement) storms and fateful presentiments. A harpsichord and two bass lutes accompanied *recitative*. On rare occasions Lully employed the guitar, tambourine, castanets.

Grove says that "Lully's instrumentation, though laboured, is poor, and his harmony not always correct. A great sameness of treatment disfigures his operas, and the same rhythm and the same counterpoint serve to illustrate the rage of Roland and the rocking of Charon's boat." He made some innovations in the orchestra, especially in his greater use of wind and percussion instruments. And he was the first to introduce women dancers on the stage, abolishing the inartistic custom of male dancers dressed as women.

In Opera Lully attached great importance to *recitative*, declaring that it was more natural (as an expression of emotion) than melodic airs. His operas were really founded upon *recitative* and his principle "la vérité dans la déclamation," followed by Rameau and Gluck, foreshadowed Berlioz and Wagner. There is an anecdote of Mlle. Lecouvreur who recited Lully's "Enfin il est dans ma puissance" and was astonished to find how faithfully the music rendered the emotion of the situation.

## WORKS BY LULLY 7

*Ballets.*

1658. Alcidiane.  
1659. La Raillerie.  
1660. Xerxès.  
1661. L'Impatience.  
— Les Saisons.  
1662. Hercule Amoureux.  
1663. Les Arts.  
— Les Noces de Village.  
1664. Les Amours déguisés.  
— Entr'actes d'Œdipe (Corneille).  
1665. Naissance de Vénus.  
— Les Gardes.  
1666. Triomphe de Bacchus (Ballet de Créquy).  
— Ballet des Muses.  
1668. Le Carnaval.  
1669. Flore.  
1671. Ballet des Ballets.  
1681. Triomphe de l'Amour.  
1685. Temple de la Paix.

*Comédies-Ballets et Pastorales*

1664. Le Mariage forcé.  
— Plaisirs de l'Ile enchantée.  
1665. Amour médecin.  
1667. Pastorale comique.  
— Le Sicilien.

1668. Festes de Versailles et intermèdes de  
Georges Dandin.  
— Grotte de Versailles.  
1669. Monsieur de Pourceaugnac.  
1670. Amants magnifiques.  
— Bourgeois gentilhomme et Ballet des Na-  
tions.  
1671. Psyché.  
1685. Idylle de la Paix (Racine).

### *Operas*

1672. Fêtes de l'Amour et de Bacchus (pastorale). (Several authors).  
1673. Cadmus et Hermione. (Quinault).  
1675. Thésée. (do.).  
— Le Carnaval (Several authors).  
(mascarade).  
1676. Atys. (Quinault).  
— Alceste. (do.).  
1677. Isis. (do.).  
1678. Psyché. (Thomas Corneille  
& Fontenelle).  
1679. Bellérophon. (do.).  
1680. Proserpine. (Quinault).  
1681. Triomphe de l'Amour (Quinault &  
(ballet). Benserade).  
1682. Persée. (Quinault).  
1683. Phaéton. (do.).  
1684. Amadis. (do.).  
1685. Roland. (do.).



- |       |  |               |
|-------|--|---------------|
| 1686. | Armide.                                    | (do.).        |
| —     | Acis et Galathée<br>(pastorale).           | (Campistron). |
| 1687. | Achille et Polixène<br>(1st act by Lully). | (Campistron). |

*Motets for two choirs*

Miserere 1664.  
Plaudo laetare 1668.  
Te Deum 1677.  
De Profundis 1683.  
Dies irae.  
Benedictus.  
(17 Motets in MS.).

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*son hôtel.*  
Le Cerf de la Viéville - *Comparaison de la*  
*musique italienne*  
*et de la musique*  
*française.*  
Bradley, G. F. - - - *The Great Days of*  
*Versailles.*



CHAPTER II

JEAN PHILIPPE RAMEAU

1683-1764



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THREE years before Lully's death was born one destined to be his great though posthumous rival, one who had to fight, not Lully, but the Lully tradition which still held sway fifty years after the master's death.

Rameau was the contemporary of J. S. Bach, whom he outlived by fourteen years. Dijon was the town in which he was born and grew up; a town which at that time was quite a centre of music. A certain amateur, M. de Malteste, for instance, used to arrange concerts once a week, which attracted ladies of quality, music-loving officers, amateurs and professionals, all eager to listen or take part. Rameau's father was organist of a church, but he had only developed his music late in life, remaining simply an amateur until his thirtieth year, when an organist, struck by his unusual talent, gave him lessons in various branches of the art.

Jean Philippe was born 5th September 1683,

and was baptised on the same day in the church of which his father was organist. His mother claimed aristocratic relations, but nothing is known of them. The Rameaus must have been poor, for in the city archives it is recorded that they twice appealed for exemption from taxation.

The baby Jean Philippe had however two noble sponsors at his baptism: the Chevalier Jean Baptiste Lantin, Sieur de Montagny and the Demoiselle Anne Philippe Valon, daughter of the Chevalier Richard Valon (whether the condescension of these godparents was due to friendship for the Rameau family or to their esteem for music does not appear). The godfather had set to music no less than thirty of the *Odes* of Horace and the *Atys* of Catullus, further, he had written a treatise on the Music of the Ancients.

Thus Jean Philippe was born in an atmosphere of music.

Jean Rameau *père* was determined that his children should not suffer as he had done for lack of early instruction. So anxious was he not to lose time that he began to teach them before they were able to read, and as soon as poor little Jean Philippe's fingers were capable of action, they were exercised on the spinet. The father was a severe teacher with a strict system of rewards and punishments, which seems to have answered well enough in the case of the three musical children of the family.

By the time he was seven, in spite of his father's

dry and repressive methods, Jean Philippe could play all kinds of music at sight on the harpsichord. His brother Claude afterwards became an organist of repute and a sister, Catherine Rameau, made a name as Claveciniste. When quite an old lady she was still giving lessons in her native town. These were the musical ones.

Of the two brothers, Claude, more brilliant as a performer, was evidently destined for a musical career but the father, less hopeful of Jean Philippe, decided that he should study law, first sending him to a Jesuit College for general education. But Jean Philippe proved an unruly scholar; he was always singing noisily or scribbling music in class instead of learning his lessons and finally had to leave with a very incomplete education. He had indeed acquired some Latin, but French was neglected by the Jesuits, and as a youth Rameau wrote and spelt his own language disgracefully. His first love-letters, it is said, were so ill-spelt that the lady twitted him with his ignorance; whereupon, with characteristic energy, he set himself to study French and so far improved as to write it correctly, but never well.

At College secular music was performed on festival days, usually in the form of operas in the Italian style. The conflict between French and Italian music was then raging and the Jesuits favoured the Italian. Even in Rameau's childhood the M. de Malteste above-mentioned had brought over the latest operas from Venice to be performed

at his concerts, a matter of no small expense and a proof of the great interest taken in music at that period.

We know not how or why, but Rameau at eighteen made a journey to Italy; then as now the magnet of artists. One would expect the ardent young student to absorb new ideas eagerly, but this was by no means the case. Was it from temperament or from too strict an education on the old lines? Certain it is that, having reached Milan, Rameau disapproved of the music there and was not even sufficiently interested to go on to Venice, then the centre of the new operatic school. After a sojourn of only a few months he retraced his steps to France (literally his steps in those days of pedestrian travelling). In after life he bitterly regretted this unaccountable lack of interest, realising what he might have learnt in Italy; no doubt it would have enlarged his outlook and developed his genius on more modern lines.

On this journey Rameau, after the manner of poor scholars, paid his way by his art, playing sometimes the violin in a band of travelling musicians, sometimes the organ in a church. For some reason he did not return to his native town, but took a post as organist at Avignon for four months and afterwards one at Clermont in Auvergne. Here he remained for six years and in the quiet town he composed his first works: some *Pièces de Clavecin* and three Cantatas (*Médée*, *L'Absence*, *L'Impatience*).



The Cantata of that day was a musical form newly imported from Italy, really a small opera or operetta to be sung in a drawing-room. In and about Clermont the novelty met with some success.

Rameau in his youth seems to have been full of restless energy; he grew weary of the restricted monotony of a provincial town. Two years before the end of his engagement he broke his contract with the Chapter, absolutely refusing to stay longer, and betook himself to Paris. Here he found a lodging with a wigmaker in the Rue du Temple opposite the church of the Cordeliers, tradition says in order to be near the celebrated organist of that church, Louis Marchand. He became Marchand's pupil and, he says, learnt much from him both in organ playing and composition. Rameau himself obtained two posts as organist, but both were wretchedly paid, and he eked out a living by teaching. With the exception of his first *Pièces de Clavecin*, published 1706, he composed nothing at this time but devoted himself to study.

Paris, at any rate, offered the best masters, and in addition to lessons from Marchand he studied Harmony, as it was then understood, under one Lacroix. He learnt the Rule of the Octave, which taught a chord for each note of the scale, but gave no explanation of inversions, considering them as separate and independent chords. Already Rameau was not satisfied with the usual theories, was already seeking some basis for a better system of harmony. Dimly he presaged some elusive secret

which would solve the contradictions apparent in the approved system.

For some unknown reason he returned to the provinces, visiting Dijon in 1716, possibly in connection with the death of his father, and was present at the marriage of his brother Claude (tradition has it to a lady with whom Jean Philippe himself was in love). He refused more than one post as organist in his native town but accepted one in his old church in Clermont. The great Massillon was preaching in Clermont at that time and thus, to the greater glory of the Cathedral, Massillon preached and Rameau played. Evidently Clermont was proud of its organist and Rameau's chair, in which he rested between whiles, is still preserved.

It was again an up-hill struggle when he returned to Paris in 1723, this time for good. At the age of forty, Rameau was still unknown. He had composed nothing of importance in the provinces, but he brought with him a work on Harmony, which excited much interest. A smaller work, *Nouveau Système de musique théorique* (1726), roused lively discussion. Pupils came to the author of the book and were for a time his only source of income, for in spite of his growing reputation, Rameau was passed over in favour of Daquin, on applying for a post as organist.<sup>1</sup> But

<sup>1</sup> In Paris the position of organist was really a good one at that time. An organist of repute like Marchand would undertake several churches, playing himself only on great occasions and

in spite of this, his means allowed him to marry (25 February 1726) Marie Louise Mangeot, daughter of a Court musician. The young bride (a girl of nineteen) had decided musical talent, a pretty voice, and sang charmingly, so well, in fact, that in 1734 she sang before the Queen in her husband's opera *Hippolyte et Aricie*. Had she possessed no fortune at all, it is said, she might have made one as an artist. She was, besides, a gentle, affectionate creature who made Rameau an excellent wife in spite of the disparity in their ages. Rameau was forty-three at the date of his marriage. His second *Pièces de Clavecin* had appeared in 1724, also another treatise on the *Basse Fondamentale et les doigts*. There are quaint instructions in this as regards fingering. The left hand is only to play one note at a time, the right hand may take chords. The right thumb is only to be used when absolutely necessary, *i.e.*, if the hand cannot reach certain notes without it. This was, of course, the universal rule until Bach discovered that the use of the thumb was quite practical. Rameau further directs that the forefinger shall play the lowest note of chords, the little finger the top note, the third or fourth the middle notes, chords to be in *arpeggio*.

festivals; on ordinary days he would send his pupils as substitutes. Pupils were a great source of income, and Marchand, who was the fashionable organist, made ten louis a day by lessons, a large sum in those days. There is an idea that Marchand at first was proud of Rameau, but afterwards grew jealous of his pupil's genius, and it was owing to him that Rameau was passed over in favour of Daquin.

Opera was really the only road to fame for a musician and Rameau's thoughts turned longingly towards it. But he was unknown, poor, without friends or influence. He began humbly enough by writing music for a Fair held at St. Germain and composed some numbers for a "Féerie burlesque" (1723). There was an Exhibition of Caraïbes (natives of the Carribean Islands) at the Théâtre Italien, and Rameau produced some incidental music for this spectacle, one piece of which has been preserved as "Air des Sauvages" (afterwards included in "*Les Indes Galantes*," 1735.<sup>1</sup>)

The tide of affairs only really began to turn after 1727, when Rameau was discovered by a patron of the arts, one Monsieur Riche de la Pouplinière, a wealthy man (fermier général), a friend of Voltaire and generously disposed towards talent of all kinds. At his house one met every one of note, artists, literary men, princes, ambassadors. This "protecteur" generously placed his organ and his private orchestra at Rameau's disposal; the musician and his wife were constant guests at his house. The fact that M. de la Pouplinière's wife was a certain Mimi Dancourt, a pupil of Rameau's, may have led to this friendship. The lady was certainly interested in music; she afterwards wrote, under the title *Notes sur la Génération Harmonique*, a criticism of her master's theories.

In this house Rameau found the appreciation he

<sup>1</sup> It had already been transcribed for harpsichord in a *Nouvelle suite de Pièces de Clavecin*.

had lacked so long, and met men of note, foremost among them, Voltaire. At last he was amongst friends who recognised his genius. The Abbé Pellegrin (known as the "Curé de l'Opéra," whose libretto *Jephthé* had been set to music by Montéclair) was induced to write a libretto for Rameau's first opera, *Hippolyte et Aricie*. It is said that he made the composer sign an agreement, but tore it up after the first rehearsal, which took place at La Pouplinière's house, so great was his enthusiasm for the music. *Hippolyte et Aricie* was finally performed at the Opera House, 1 Oct. 1733, the composer being already fifty years of age. During the next twenty-one years, however, he composed twenty-one operas, as if to make up for lost time.

The Opera was immediately attacked by Lully-worshippers, a sure sign that the work was original and interesting. The composer was too "Italian," he used strange chords, his music was unnecessarily difficult. The *Mercure*, however, declared the music "mâle et harmonieuse," and one musician, Campra, recognised Rameau's genius, for, said he, the score contained sufficient material for ten operas "such as the rest of us write . . . this man will eclipse us all."

Yet in spite of friendly support the opera was not really a success. Rameau was disappointed, but, always stoical in his failures, he said simply, "I was mistaken. I thought my taste would be successful; I have no other. I shall compose no more."

Fortunately he soon recovered sufficiently to make another venture in the form known as *Opéra ballet*, and in 1735 produced *Les Indes Galantes* above referred to.

*Castor et Pollux* followed in 1737 with the advantage of a more logical libretto, and with this Rameau's fame was established. He was acclaimed as France's greatest composer. Crowds flocked to see this opera, the receipts on the very last night amounting to 4,500 livres.

But there was still much hostile criticism. In fact, at every step throughout his life Rameau was destined to find hostile critics, detractors, enemies. At this time it was the still devoted Lullystes to whom Rameau represented the daring innovator, the rebel against the Lully tradition. They nicknamed his followers "Ramoneurs" and carried on a wordy warfare. Rameau's music was, first and foremost, too difficult of execution, his "prodigieuse mécanique" was impossible, his *recitatives* were not to the popular taste. Voltaire observed that the Lullystes were horrified at the amount of semiquavers in Rameau's music.<sup>1</sup> As for Rameau himself, he protested just as Lully had done before him, that he only aimed at making his art as natural as possible, at taking Nature for his model, which perhaps meant that he tried to depict emotion as naturally as possible. He certainly theorised about

<sup>1</sup> "You cannot think how alarming it is to see 32 notes in one single bar" (Viéville).

it. However that may be, 1737 saw the publication of another book of theory, *La Génération Harmonique*, and Rameau started a school of composition in his own house. Evidently he was now winning his way to fame in spite of hostile critics, and in spite, too, of his own proud, reserved, even repellent nature, which by no means made for popularity. And another ballet, *Festes d'Hébé ou les talents lyriques*, dedicated to the Duchesse du Maine and performed 1739, set the seal on Rameau's success as a composer. (In this is found the pretty Tambourin in E minor, which still charms musicians). His genius was now acknowledged. Duly the adversaries deplored the "coquetterie et volupté" of this latest work.

In November of the next year Paris was greatly excited over the performance of *Dardanus*. Boxes were sold out a week beforehand. Everywhere in cafés and drawing-rooms discussion raged between Lullystes and Ramoneurs. But finally the evening of November 19th 1740 was a veritable triumph for Rameau. In vain the Lullystes raged against his music as difficult, obscure, "cabalistique," as a medley with echoes of Pont Neuf airs. In vain they complained that for three long hours the hard-worked orchestra had not even time to sneeze! Perennial complaint of the Old against the New, of the Accustomed against every original idea, every improvement in means of expression! It takes a whole generation, Voltaire remarked, for the human ear to grow familiar with a new musical style.



An English nobleman in Paris at that time notes that although everyone was abusing Rameau's "horrible" work, yet it was impossible to get a seat at the opera.

A clever epigram of about this date voices the indignation of the Lullystes :

" Si le difficile est beau  
C'est un grand homme que Rameau,  
Mais si le beau par aventure  
N'était que la simple nature  
Quel petit homme que Rameau."<sup>1</sup>

In 1745, with Voltaire as librettist, Rameau composed *La Princesse de Navarre* to celebrate the marriage of the Dauphin with Marie Thérèse. This was performed at Versailles. The King paid all expenses of the performance and gave Rameau a yearly pension of 2,000 livres<sup>2</sup> with the title "Compositeur de la musique de la Chambre." After this success Rameau's style grew lighter, more elegant.

Then followed various smaller works and "Pièces d'Occasion."

*Platée* (1745), a kind of opera bouffe, was not a success, even the court did not care for it.

*Les Fêtes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour* (1747),

<sup>1</sup> " If difficulty be a test  
Of beauty, great let Rameau be,  
But if perchance simplicity  
Be beauty, then how small is he." (Roughly translated).

<sup>2</sup> A livre = about 1 franc.



which celebrated the Dauphin's second marriage, written without inspiration, failed to inspire the public. *Naïs*, another "occasional" work, on the signature of the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (1749), was also a failure.

Rameau at first had rebelled against the conventional operatic routine, but in reality he was no innovator and clung to the old classical subjects with spectacular display. Perhaps if in those youthful wanderings he had stayed longer in Italy, he might have absorbed the more modern ideas. But now it was too late. Rameau was, in fact, between two schools. The Lullystes persecuted him as an innovator, whilst the Moderns, who presently appeared on the scene, considered him the representative of the antiquated methods and abused him from quite a different point of view.

It is curious to find the Lullystes, who had attacked his *Castor et Pollux* on its first appearance, defending that same opera with the greatest obstinacy some forty years later against the partisans of Gluck, whose music they condemned as a foreign invasion, its followers afflicted with "étrangéromanie."

The music of *Zoroastre* (1749) was more inspired than some of these other lighter works. Unfortunately the gentlemen of the King's household, displeased because their usual free passes had been curtailed, did their best to make the piece a failure. There was plenty of discussion, but Rameau never

made large sums from his works. A verse of the time commented on the fact.

- “ Rien pour l’auteur de la musique,  
Pour l’auteur du p<sup>o</sup>eme rien  
.  
.  
.  
Rameau doit aller à pied  
Les directeurs en carosse.”<sup>1</sup>

And now the New, a far more formidable rival than the Lullystes, came knocking at the door.

In 1752 a company of Italian artists arrived in Paris with a repertory of new light Italian operas. Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona* took Parisians by storm with its freshness and vivacity, and the Encyclopædists acclaimed Italian music as the only true and spontaneous art. Rousseau attacked French music (1753) with his eternal refrain of “Return to Nature.” Grimm, “the German disguised as a Parisian,” followed with virulent attacks on French Opera, French *esprit*, and special attacks on Rameau as representative of French music. Especially Rousseau pursued Rameau implacably, continuing his diatribes even after the composer's death. Rameau, impatient, proud, intolerant, replied to these attacks; the wordy war waxed furious on both sides. The old conflict of Lullystes *versus* Ramoneurs paled before this *Guerre des Bouffons*, so called from the “Bouffon” Manelli, chief singer of the Italian *troupe*. The charm of these light operas lay in the unconventionality of their sub-

<sup>1</sup> “Nothing for the composer, nor for the poet, Rameau must trudge on foot, the directors ride in their carriage.”

jects, taken from scenes and persons in ordinary life, humorously treated. They came as a delightful relief after the stilted classical heroes and heroines, the threadbare episodes of gods and goddesses, the Greek and Roman warriors in tunics, with ribbons and helmets on powdered wigs, in short, all the artificial conventions of which people had at last grown unutterably weary.

All Paris joined in these heated discussions. Even the Court took sides. The King, inspired by Madame de Pompadour, was for French music whilst the Queen preferred Italian, and at the Opera partisans gathered near the royal boxes, standing by the "Coin du Roi" or the "Coin de la Reine," according to their opinions.

Leaflets were distributed from their respective corners. The Italian party was on the whole more vivacious and enthusiastic than the French, Rousseau says, and probably this was the case, as partisans of the New against the Old are usually the more youthful and vigorous element.

The Encyclopædists were interested in every branch of science and dabbled in the problems of music. D'Alembert at first wrote in support of Rameau's theories, even collaborating with him (greatly to the advantage of Rameau's literary style, which was so poor as to be a serious drawback to his arguments). But presently D'Alembert joined Grimm, Holbach, Rousseau, and all with one accord began to attack French music and Rameau as its representative. They condemned,

of course, the artificial conventions which had so long ruled the French operatic stage, the classic mythological subjects, the stilted *libretti*, the monotonous ballets. The opera had become a mere vehicle for spectacular display and dancing, and people at this time were vaguely longing for "Nature."

The Encyclopædists, the Moderns of their days, were unsparing critics of everything connected with the old style, they condemned French *recitative* as monotonous and dragging, French airs as insipid and dull. Above all they wanted real human interest instead of ballets with Apollo or Hercules as figure-heads. In their zeal they declared duets "unnatural," whilst Rousseau condemned fugues as "the remains of the Gothic spirit" (*esprit gothique*), and clamoured for the supremacy of vocal art and simple accompaniments to song. Harmony, he declared, was only physical and mechanical in its effects, Melody was all-important. D'Alembert particularly disliked Sonatas as being mere intellectual exercises. "Sonate, que me veux-tu?" the saying of Fontenelle, was frequently quoted. Undoubtedly the Encyclopædists were right in many of their theories, but they were not musicians and many of their opinions shot wide of the mark in consequence. They considered indeed that there was far too much music in French opera!

Rousseau, the leader of these attacks, had really an extraordinarily keen feeling for music, without being "musical" in the true sense of the word.

One must grant him a knack of melody, and certain facility in composing even. His opera, *Le Devin du Village*, contained some pretty airs which became, and have remained, popular. In rustic scenes he created some charming effects by simple means, and his air, "Allons dormir sous les ormeaux," became almost a folk song in Geneva. The loves of Colin and Colinette in the song, "Quand on sait bien aimer que la vie est charmante," was also deservedly a success. Grétry pronounced him an artist possessing sentiment but ignoring the rules of his art. In short, Rousseau possessed a keen musical sense, was extremely impressionable as regards music, but this did not make him a musician; moreover, he never seemed to realise that his lack of musical education was in any way an impediment to perfect understanding. Rousseau went on attacking French opera, its artists and composers so savagely that at last the exasperated operatic artists solemnly burnt his effigy one evening, whilst the directors refused him admission to their performance henceforth—a prohibition only withdrawn some twenty years later at Gluck's special request.

He ridiculed operatic stage effects, "the cars of gods and goddesses consisting of planks suspended by a cord, with a piece of cloth hanging in front painted to represent a cloud, the demons issuing from trap doors and climbing into the clouds . . . the frightful cries and groans from the singers, whilst the orchestra is a ceaseless *charivari* of in-

struments, no melody, a perpetual droning and buzzing in the bass, the most gloomy, deadening noise I ever heard in my life," and he described the joy of the audience when anything like an Air emerged.

His letter on French music (1753) is amusingly dogmatic: "I think I have made it clear that there is neither rhythm nor melody in French music, because the language is not capable of it; that French singing is a continual barking, unbearable to any ear not accustomed to it; that French harmony is crude, without expression and showing its scholastic origin; that French *Airs* are no *Airs*, that French *recitative* is not *recitative* at all. Whence I conclude that the French have no music and cannot have any; or that if ever they had a music of their own, so much the worse for them."

Thus the philosopher. It is worthy of note that some years later Rousseau became a Gluck-worshipper and an ardent champion of French against Italian music! This was in the war of Gluckistes *versus* Piccinistes.

Rousseau's letter naturally excited heated controversy. Rameau replied from the point of view of the musician, and was drawn into a passionate and bitter discussion, in which his lack of clearness and literary style often placed him at a disadvantage. Unfortunately he was not in touch or in sympathy with the aspirations and ideals of his day (how unlike Lully, the man of his moment!)

and clung to his spectacular splendours and regular "symphonies," utterly failing to realise the need for a new form of art.

In these years Rameau did not compose much, but wrote his "Démonstration du Principe de l'Harmonie" and "Nouvelles Reflexions sur la Démonstration du Principe de l'Harmonie servant de base à tout l'art Musicale" (1752).

His "Ballet Héroïque" *Acanthe et Céphise* (1751), one of the usual spectacular pieces, written to celebrate the birth of the Duc de Bourgogne, was the last of his larger works, but several small one-act pieces, chiefly played at Court, followed. *Les Paladins*, in three acts, was the last of his works performed at the opera and was not a success, the public disliked its mixture of serious and comic elements. The unsparing critics declared that Rameau was now too old and should cease composing. He himself knew well enough that they were right. He was ill as well as old and grew weaker day by day. To a friend he said: "Every day I improve in style, but I have no longer any genius." (De jour en jour j'acquiers du goût, mais je n'ai plus de génie).

Another book on theory, "Observations sur notre Instinct pour la Musique," was published in 1754 and, whatever faults the Encyclopædists might find in it, the Censor, a certain M. Trublet, approved of the work in these terms: "By order of Monseigneur le Chancelier I have read a manuscript entitled 'Observations on our Instinct for



Music, etc., and I believe that the publication of the same would be both an honour and a service rendered to French music. Paris, 12 April, 1754. Trublet."

This book, in beautifully clear type, is interesting reading for musicians, containing as it does the gropings of a mind of genius after a solution which eluded his grasp. It is rather pathetic to read the old musician's cogitations on Harmony and on the mysterious reason which leads the human mind to regard the Fifth, for instance, as a peculiarly satisfactory interval, and to compare this book with elementary text books of to-day, in which children learn what the old genius vainly sought.

"La Musique est une science qui doit avoir des règles certaines," he had said in his *Traité* of 1722, and all his later writings were but variations on this theme. Music, he insisted, was a physico-mathematical science and he himself had been led to study it mathematically from his youth upward. His philosophical mind was chiefly interested in harmony. "It is harmony and not melody which guides us," he declared, and "a musical sound is complex, containing a kind of interior song," therefore we must begin by studying the nature of sound.

He noticed how "ordinary folk, not musicians, instinctively sing or play the right bass note to a melody," and felt that this must be based upon a natural law.



Rousseau criticised Rameau's musical theories as he criticised his music, and his ignorance led him to some foolish conclusions. He flatly contradicted Rameau's theory as to the necessity of the harmonic bass, "M. Rameau claims that the upper or melodic part naturally suggests its bass and that anyone with a true although untrained ear will naturally find this bass. This is a musician's pre-conceived idea, one always disproved by experience. One who has never heard either bass or harmony will never find either harmony or bass, nay more, he will not like them if he does hear them, and will greatly prefer simple unison." Rousseau himself is convinced that no harmony is so delightful as unison, and if we want chords it is because our taste is depraved. He had heard a child playing single notes on the piano, its hands being too small to grasp chords, and was charmed by the effect.

Meantime, in spite of the persecutions of his enemies, Rameau still enjoyed the fame of an established reputation and in these last years revivals of his works still excited enthusiasm. When *Dardanus*, for instance, was revived in 1760, a perfect storm of applause greeted the old man when he was discovered hiding shyly, as was his wont, in a corner of his box. He was not without honour in his own country, for Dijon had solemnly exempted him and his relatives from taxation, and as a further mark of esteem made him member of her Académie in 1761. In the same year Louis

XV. conferred the rank of nobility upon him with the order of St. Michel.

Close upon eighty years of age he still devoted himself to the theory of his beloved art, working feverishly in spite of failing strength.

His *Code de Musique Pratique* (1760), *L'Origine des Sciences* (1761), and a last investigation into musical sound, le "corps sonore," appeared in 1762 with a *Lettre aux Philosophes*. In spite of illness he was preparing to conduct rehearsals of a last work, *Abaris ou les Boréades*, an opera in five acts, when he grew rapidly worse and died in his house in the Rue des Bons Enfants, 22nd September 1764. There is a story, characteristic if not true, that almost with his last breath he reproved the priest at his bedside for intoning out of tune.

His death was regarded as a national calamity. Paris honoured her musician by a splendid funeral at the Church of St. Eustace. Most of the principal cities held memorial services and a fortnight after his death a Mass for the repose of his soul was celebrated at the Church of *Les Pères de l'Oratoire*, at which the orchestra performed selections from *Castor et Pollux* and others of his works. The expense of this was borne by the Opera, and 1,600 invitations were issued in the name of the widow and her son. Not only was the church crowded, but for several years the anniversary of Rameau's death was observed in a similar way.

A coldly eulogistic epitaph ran thus:

“ Ci-gît le célèbre Rameau.  
Il fut par son vaste génie  
De la Musique le flambeau,  
Et l'objet des traits de l'envie.  
Muses, pleurez sur son tombeau.”<sup>1</sup>

Rameau, the man, appears to have been reserved and unapproachable in an extraordinary degree. Where Lully's success had been in a great measure due to his own personal popularity, or at all events influence, Rameau won fame really in spite of himself, solely by the force of his genius. Certainly he was not popular, scarcely amiable. Reserved and taciturn, he had few friends and even his wife knew next to nothing of his early life. In his funeral oration the friend of his last years was obliged to confess that he knew scarcely anything about Rameau's private life. He was no courtier, nor did he ever condescend to seek favour with any one, great or small. Chabanon relates a characteristic anecdote: A *maître de Ballet* wanted Rameau to shorten some of his minuets, urging that Royalty might find them too long. “Sir,” replied Rameau, “if he is not told that he will find them long, he will think they are short.”

Of Rameau's domestic relations little is known, but the fact that his youngest daughter, Marie Alexandrine, married the Mousquetaire de Gaul-

<sup>1</sup> “ Here lies the celebrated Rameau.  
Whose great genius was the torch of Music  
And the object of Envy's darts.  
Muses, weep upon his tomb.”

thier immediately after her father's death perhaps shows that in his lifetime he had opposed the match. On the other hand, he bestowed a handsome dowry on his other daughter, Marie Louise, on her entrance into a convent.

The only son, Claude François, obtained the post of "Valet de chambre du roi" through his father's influence, a post which cost Rameau quite a large sum of money in addition to a handsome yearly allowance.

He was accused of undue harshness towards a nephew, Jean François, threatening to have him transported to the Colonies for some *escapade* or other. But on the showing of Diderot even, the young man seems to have been an incorrigibly hopeless character, who abused his uncle's kindness and hospitality. And it is known that Rameau sent yearly sums of money to his sister the *Claveciniste* at Dijon during the last years of her life, sums regularly paid up to the year of her death, 1762.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rameau wrote a kind and helpful letter to a young man who asked for his advice about composing an opera (1740). "One must understand the art of staging, have studied Nature so as to depict her as faithfully as possible; one must visualise all the characters, must *feel* dancing and its movements, not to speak of all details; must know the voice, the art of acting, etc. The Ballet would be better than Tragedy as a beginning. . . . . Before attempting a big work one must have written smaller ones, cantatas, *divertissements*, a thousand trifles of the kind which feed and inspire the mind and render one unconsciously capable of the greatest things. I watched the stage since I was twelve; I was fifty before I composed opera, even then I did not consider myself capable of doing so. I ventured, succeeded, continued."

Rameau was tall and unusually thin, attenuated even; an unkind description compared him to an organ pipe, with legs like flutes. His features were large and strongly marked, with piercing black eyes. He had a marked resemblance to Voltaire, and a picture of the two meeting shows the resemblance strikingly. His voice was loud and harsh and in discussion he would shout excitedly until exhausted, when his voice would fail and reduce him to silence, still gasping and gesticulating helplessly.

He loved to take long solitary walks and his tall spare figure was a familiar object striding along by the Tuileries or out in the country. Apparently he would be rapt in meditation, perhaps thinking out a musical phrase or pondering over some problem of harmony. But once when a friend, meeting him, enquired what he was thinking of, Rameau gazed at him absently for a moment and then answered "Nothing." Probably his mind was working unconsciously to himself, for often on returning home he would hastily write out or play some new theme. (He usually composed violin in hand, not often at the harpsichord).

His enemies declared he had no heart; that he was incapable of affection. Diderot said Rameau's wife and daughter might die but he would not care, provided the passing bell tolled in tune; further, he was mean, avaricious, pitiless towards creditors. Avaricious, Rameau probably was. At the time of his death his house was very poorly

furnished, he and his wife were wretchedly dressed, yet large sums were found in the drawers of his writing table. There are instances recorded in which he drove hard bargains. Perhaps he had learnt the value of money too well in those long years of grinding poverty in his youth and early manhood. Yet the instances of kindness and even generosity towards sister and nephew must not be forgotten. And Rameau was free from petty jealousy. He would praise the work of others unstintingly, even of his enemies, when they deserved it. For instance, he praised the Italian opera, the most formidable rival of his own.<sup>1</sup> He was really too shy to make many friends or enjoy great popularity and always hid at the back of his box at the Opera. Once after a successful performance of one of his works at Fontainebleau he was found hiding in a remote and disused apartment. He said that applause embarrassed him, he did not know how to receive it. Shy, proud, reserved, frugal, simple, harsh—these are not characteristics which appeal to the great world.

In reality Rameau's whole soul centred in music, all else mattered little. As Piron said of him: "All his mind and all his soul were in his harpsichord and when he had closed that, the house was empty, there was no one at home." When composing, he would sing in a very harsh voice, play his shabby old *clavecin*, shout, gesticulate. And at rehearsals he seemed completely possessed by

<sup>1</sup> He admired Lully generously. "Lully thought on a grand scale," he said.

his art; if anyone ventured to approach, he would waive the intruder impatiently away without even glancing at him. He was very severe and *brusque* with his librettists.

But he was known to shed tears when a musical performance pleased him. There is a touching simplicity about his devotion to music. When some one asked him, a few months before his death, if he did not really prefer the sound of applause to the music of his operas, the old man thought for a moment and then said seriously, "No, I like my music best."

Music was certainly Rameau's life. And what interested him most was really the theory of music. He even thought time spent in composition wasted in comparison with that used in investigating the principles of his art. He certainly considered his Theory of music the best part of himself. With endless patience he pursued the problems of sound, to him elusive, but laying precious foundations for future students.

Rameau was the first to investigate the nature of chords, the products of polyphonic melody, "groups of sounds." For the conception of music as Harmony was now being definitely substituted for that of Polyphony. Rameau's assertion that Harmony and not Melody should be the guiding principle drew upon him the wrath of the Encyclopædists who recognised in Melody the simplicity they so ardently desired. Rameau's constant broodings and searchings into the phenomena



of sound are interesting. He notices that the human voice naturally rises from a note to its Fifth and that the ear naturally provides a bass to a melody. Any musician of even small attainments, in accompanying a song heard for the first time, employs the Fifth, later he may use the Third. The Fifth is evidently the most perfect interval, then the Third. And he traces the Fifth to the vibrations of a musical note (*corps sonore*). In this he followed Descartes, noting the intervals of the Harmonic Chord and their order. This had already been done, e.g., in Zerlino's "*Institutions Harmoniques*," but Rameau's discovery that the fourth and sixth are inversions of the common chord was original, although at the time other students were working on similar lines. Before Rameau many inversions had been considered separate chords. Later theorists like Helmholtz and Riemann acknowledge Rameau's contribution to musical science.

In his own day his theories attracted attention both at home and abroad. In other countries he was, in fact, better known as a theorist than as a musician; and in Germany his ideas were keenly discussed.

J. S. Bach and his son Philip Emmanuel were both "*antiramistes*," yet the great Bach taught his pupils Rameau's "*Basse fondamentale*" all the same. Haendel held Rameau in high esteem, and the *Traité de l'Harmonie* was translated into English. In provincial France Rameau was greatly,



although perhaps uncomprehendingly, respected, and after his death he was ranked among the Geometricians, as M. de Laurencie says, placed somewhere between a "Traité sur les Sections Coniques" and a book on Algebra!

It is indeed rare to find this combination of the scientist and the creative artist, but in Rameau the two were united, not, in fact, without detriment to his reputation as a composer. In his earlier days, Lullystes reproached him for being too mechanical, dubbing him the Geometrician who composed according to algebraic formulas. The term "savant" applied to his compositions was a damning criticism. Yet Rameau himself aimed constantly at Nature, which he declared the source of all art, just as Lully had done before him. Perhaps he was too apt to theorise about the means of expressing "Nature." He insisted, for instance, that each chord corresponded to an emotion; there are sad, languishing, tender, gay and surprising chords. Joy is expressed by concords, sadness by discords and minor keys, grief and suffering by unprepared discords. His *Plaines Tendres* contains diminished chords and chords of the 9th and 11th. "The scale of *fa* is appropriate to tempests and rages. *Re, la, mi* to grand and magnificent styles; *ut* and *fa* minor to 'chants lugubres.'" But he concludes that, after all, composers must write as they are inspired. He had, says M. Prunières, une "mentalité harmonique" and felt harmony to be of supreme importance, melody only secondary,

even insisting that when pupils are taught singing, every melody should be accompanied by its full harmony in order to educate the ear.

His clear, logical mind, reflective rather than spontaneously emotional, turned towards descriptive music. It was the fashion then to portray natural objects in sound,—witness the charming *genre* pieces of the clavecinistes,—and Rameau wrote Programme music quite as much as moderns do. In the Prologue of *Dardanus* there is a scene, “The Pleasures in conflict with Jealousy,” both characterised by typical *motifs*. These themes are stated separately until “Jealousy, pursued by Venus, ceases to fret the Pleasures; they gradually grow languid and finally fall asleep.” In *Platée* (ballet comique) there are imitations of frogs croaking, birds, a donkey braying.

In a “*scène infernale*” (*Castor et Pollux*, Act 4) Rameau surpassed his predecessors, who had simply assigned to Demons the musical expression usually employed to portray Anger; they never had any “local colour,” says M. Laloy.<sup>1</sup> But Rameau contrived by rhythm and harmony to give them “atmosphere,” and his “*chœur infernale*” remained unrivalled until Gluck’s *Orpheus* surpassed it.

Rameau’s descriptive Harpsichord Pieces follow the fashion of the day (*Rappel des Oiseaux*, *La Poule*, etc.) He anticipated Debussy in *Les Tour-*

<sup>1</sup> Laloy, L.     *Rameau*.

*billons*, in which he tried to render "gusts of wind stirring up whirls of dust."

It is curious to find Rameau insisting that "the ruling quality of French music is Sentiment, which has no precise movement and therefore cannot be forced into regular rhythm without losing the charm of Truthfulness." For his own best work, the music in which he showed himself most truly and spontaneously inspired, is his dance music. His Dance Tunes are masterpieces in which his mastery of rhythm, his instinct for clearness and concision are most evident, they are his most original works; whilst his vocal airs, not well written for the voice, are forgotten. Rameau's dance tunes were frequently used in Italy and other countries for the Ballets in Italian opera, so far superior were they to all others.<sup>1</sup> He did not modulate much or vary his tonality by chromatics, but he was considered very daring in his famous modulation from F minor to E flat, which occurs in *Castor and Pollux* ("que tout gémit," Act 1). Adam alludes to this as a touch of genius, great in its simplicity. For over half a century musicians went on quoting Rameau's *fa, la, mi* as the most daring modulation conceivable. Rameau himself marvelled at Lully's skill in rising from Subdominant to Tonic. "Then, striding to Dominant with redoubled energy . . . again rousing our desire for the Tonic which must follow, etc."

<sup>1</sup> Funeral oration, Maret. Even Diderot said Rameau's dance tunes would be immortal.

Rameau's *recitative* does not differ essentially from Lully's. *La vérité dans la déclamation* was still the device. Both tried to express emotion by following the accents of the spoken word. Rameau, however, supported his *recitative* more fully by harmony during the whole of the phrase instead of merely punctuating it by a cadence at the end. Also he modulated more freely and used augmented and diminished intervals (notably the fifth) to express grief or anxiety. According to his theories ascending notes and phrases express joy, eagerness, hope, etc., descending ones the reverse. Sometimes he lets the voice fall over a long interval, *e.g.*, the tenth. A descending chromatic passage in *Hippolyte* had to be abandoned because of its difficulty, and his enemies were always complaining of his difficult music.

He was more successful with instrumental than with vocal music.

His orchestra had the same instruments as that of his predecessors: strings and woodwind, with the harpsichord as support in the bass. But he made more use of the strings and his violin parts were fuller. Also he wrote more melodious parts for horns, giving them difficult running passages. By novel combinations of *timbres* and by groups of instruments he obtained more colour. In *les Surprises d'Amour* he introduced two groups: violins and flutes for "Sybarites," trumpets and kettledrums for warriors. He accented his melodies sometimes by *pizzicato* effects. He was rather fond

of mechanical subjects such as tempests, earthquakes, fire music, and made great effects with the simple means at his disposal. For storms, for instance, he employed scales in contrary motion; fire he suggests by brilliant sparkles of trills and grace notes (*Zoroaster*). Sometimes the titles of his descriptive music are very ambitious (not more so than those of his contemporaries), e.g., "The Monster Leaving the Waves," "The Clearing of Chaos" (prologue of *Zaïs*), "The Assault of Titans," attempted by syncopated notes expressing rugged, broken effort.<sup>1</sup>

In a quaint pamphlet (Riedel) Lully and Rameau meet as shades in the Elysian Fields and, on hearing of Gluck ("the name sounds rather Tudesque," says Rameau), they enquire, what does the world think of Us since the appearance of *Iphigénie*? They are told, "All persons of taste say: in the harmony of M. Rameau there is too much art and in the melody of M. Lully there is too little. But the composer of *Iphigénie* has united your remarkable talents with everything else. . . . he has had the good fortune to surpass you." A point of view open to the criticism of posterity.

<sup>1</sup> M. de la Laurencie. See Prof. Nieck's "The orchestration of J. P. Rameau." Monthly Musical Record, 1910.

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*Operas*

1733. Hippolyte et Aricie. (Pellegrin).  
 1735. Les Indes Galantes. (Fuzelier).  
 1737. Castor et Pollux. (Bernard).  
 1739. Les Fêtes d'Hébé ou les Talens Lyriques.  
       (Mondorge and others).  
       — Dardanus. (Leclerc de la Bruère).  
 1745. La Princesse de Navarre. (Voltaire).  
       — Le Temple de la Gloire. (Voltaire).  
       — Platée ou Junon jalouse. (D'Autreau et  
       d'Orville).  
       — Les Fêtes de Polymnie. (Cahusac).  
       — Les Fêtes de Ramire. (Voltaire).  
 1747. Les Fêtes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour.  
       (Cahusac).  
 1748. Zaïs. (Cahusac).  
       — Pygmalion. (Sovot).  
       — Les Surprises de l'Amour. (Marmontel &  
       Bernard).  
 1749. Naïs. (Cahusac).  
       — Zoroastre. (Cahusac).  
 1751. La Guirlande ou les fleurs enchantées.  
       (Marmontel).  
       — Acanthe et Céphise. (Marmontel).  
 1753. Daphnis et Eglée. (Collé).  
       — Lisis et Délie. (Marmontel).  
 1754. La Naissance d'Osiris. (Cahusac).  
       — Anacréon. (Cahusac).

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 Zéphyre (pastorale) } Authors  
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*Pieces for Harpsichord*

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*La Dauphine.* 1747.

*Cantatas*

*Le Berger fidèle. Aquilon et Orinthie* - - 1728

*Motets*

*Laboravi* - 1732. *Il convertendo* - 1751

*Theoretical Works*

*Nouveau Système de musique théorique* - 1726  
*Génération harmonique* - - - - 1737  
*Démonstration du principe de l'Harmonie*  
*servant de base à tout l'art Musical,*  
*théorique et pratique* - - - - 1750  
*Nouvelles réflexions sur la démonstration du*  
*principe de l'Harmonie servant de*  
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*pratique* - - - - 1752  
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CHAPTER III  
THE CLAVECIN COMPOSERS  
1600-1768



## CHAPTER III

### THE CLAVECIN COMPOSERS

1600-1768

THE music written for clavecin or harpsichord in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is of great importance as being the forerunner, or rather the ancestor, of all modern literature for the Pianoforte, whilst from the old masters of the clavecin the brilliant pianists of our day have developed. In an unbroken line is the evolution from virginal or spinet, harpsichord, clavichord to concert grand. In the same way compositions develop from the simplicity of English Tudor composers for the Virginal (Tallis, Bird, Ball, Morley, of the sixteenth century<sup>1</sup>), through the school of French clavecin composers, through Emmanuel Bach, Scarlatti, Mozart, to Beethoven and the moderns.

The spinet gradually supplanted the lute as the instrument for solos and accompaniments, for chamber music in short, and by the end of the sixteenth century it had become a favourite, especially with women.

<sup>1</sup> See "Parthenia, or the Maydenhead of the first Musick that was ever printed for the Virginnalls," 1611.

Queen Elizabeth played the virginals strictly for her own amusement, not encouraging courtiers to listen and criticise. A later queen, Marie Antoinette, was quite a talented performer on the harpsichord and her playing delighted the Court. There was even a woman composer, Elizabeth Claudine, (the wife of La Guerre, organist of Saint Severin), who composed a *Recueil de Sonates pour Clavecin* (1669-1729). During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the post of spinet player to kings and queens was one of the regular appointments of royal households.

Among the earlier of these court harpsichord players in France were Matthieu Dugay (1548), Augustin Langlois (1559), Claude Chabeausseau (1602), Jacques Champion Sieur de la Chapelle (1609), Jacques le Breton (1624).

The harpsichord was used also in orchestras and churches until the end of the eighteenth century.

The chief French Clavecinistes lived during the period 1600-1768 and include Chambonnières, Loeilly, Couperin, Rameau, Schobert. The first of these is really the father of the French School of harpsichord players and composers.

Jacques Champion de Chambonnières, (after his marriage to a widow of Chambonnières he added the name of her estate to his own and is known by it), came of a musical family. Both his father and grandfather (Thomas and Jacques Champion) were organists. Born under Louis XIII, about 1620, the date of his death is approximately 1670. Like

the rest of his family, he played the organ well, but the harpsichord was the instrument on which he really excelled. He was famous as a performer and especially noted for his soft yet full tone. Few details as to his life are preserved, and little of his music. He was chief court clavecinist under Louis XIV and founded a school of clavecin players. Among his pupils are Hardelle, Buret, Gautier, François and Louis Couperin, uncles of "le grand" Couperin. Evidently he had a prosperous career and showed, moreover, a generous nature in encouraging and instructing Louis Couperin. It chanced that once during his visits to his country estate a serenade written by a young and untaught musician was submitted to him. Chambonnières was so struck by it that he brought the composer, Louis Couperin, to Paris as a pupil and afterwards introduced him at Court, where he obtained an appointment; the rest of the Couperin family came to Paris and became noted musicians.

Chambonnières composed dances of every kind: Courantes, Giges, Sarabandes, Pavanes, grouping them in *Suites* and giving each piece a descriptive title (as was the fashion at that time), although the titles seldom show any real connection with the music. He has such titles as *La Dunkerque*, *La Toute Belle*, *Iris*, *La Rare*. This fashion originated with the lute-players, who had made descriptive titles a matter of form, often without any connection with the music.

A critic complains that in a piece for the lute

supposed to describe a storm, it was a pity the composer had not added a note to say *when* it lightened and when it thundered.<sup>1</sup>

Chambonnières' works are nearly always written in four parts and in good counterpoint. His style is simple and clear, with few of the embellishments and ornaments so much in favour at that period.

*La Rare* (in A minor) is one of his most interesting pieces; others are a Courante, Sarabande and a Loureuse (slow dance in 6/4 time). He published two volumes of "Pièces de Clavessin," but specimens of his score are extremely rare.<sup>2</sup>

The Couperins were another of those families of musicians who spring up in unexpected places like rare plants, flourishing for a generation or two until their artistic vitality is exhausted, and culminating usually in one supreme genius. The Couperins were musicians during two hundred years, and François, called "le grand," was their genius.

The original family (of Chaumes en Brie), consisted of three brothers: François, Louis and Charles, who all came to settle in Paris through the influence of Chambonnières and became musicians of repute. All three were organists of the Church of St. Gervais, and Louis, as we have seen, was made Court musician (1630-1665).

Charles, the father of "le grand," died young

<sup>1</sup> In a volume of Pieces for the Lute (Denis Gaultier) occurs the title, "Phaeton struck by lightning."

<sup>2</sup> M. Farrenc possessed some of his original score.

(1632-1669), François being born only a year before his father's death. But a friend of the family, one Tomelin, an organist, practically adopted the child and taught him the organ. In course of time François too received the post of organist at St. Gervais, but the date of his appointment is uncertain.

His fame, however, both as performer and composer, rests on the clavecin. His life seems to have been uneventful; he was of the fortunate ones whose history is too smooth for chronicling. Like Chambonnières, he became harpsichord player to the king, was greatly admired at Court, *fêted* and flattered in aristocratic houses.

Fashionable gatherings were incomplete without Couperin at the harpsichord, whilst on Sunday evenings the king desired his presence at court Chamber concerts. He mentions this in the introduction to his Third Book of Pieces for the Clavecin (published 1722) under the title "Concerts Royaux." He had written these pieces especially for the "petits concerts du roi," at which he played the harpsichord nearly every Sunday throughout the year, and he trusts the public will like these pieces as much as the late king did. Musicians were certainly sure of an appreciative listener in Louis XIV; no monarch ever loved music more. He enjoyed the "petits concerts" as much as Grand Opera, and occasionally sang an air himself at these evenings. He evidently recognised Couperin's genius and treated him generously, as was his wont with artists. "For twenty years," Coup-

erin says, "I have had the honour of being in the King's service and of teaching Monseigneur le Dauphin, the Duc de Bourgogne and six other Princes and Princesses of the Royal House." And in his dedication to Louis XV of his *Méthode de Clavecin* (1716) he speaks of "the tokens of kindness and satisfaction bestowed on me by the late King, your great grandfather, during the twenty-three years during which he listened to my works; those bestowed by your august father, to whom I had the privilege of teaching composition and counterpoint for more than twelve years." (A somewhat long course of instruction without apparently any striking result).

He was the fashionable teacher of the harpsichord, and great ladies were proud of being his pupils. His *Art de toucher le Clavecin* (1717), the first book of instruction especially devoted to the instrument, shows him an enthusiastic and painstaking teacher. He instructs the pupils not only in notation and *technique*, but how to sit gracefully at the clavier, the right foot slightly extended, the arm horizontal, forming a straight line from elbow to fingers, sometimes with a bar placed above the hands of the beginner to regulate their height, for the tone becomes hard if the hands are held too high. . . . .

He especially warns the pupil against mannerisms of all kinds, such as "coquetting with the public"; sometimes he even places a mirror so that the pupil may see and correct any awkwardness or



“ grimaces.” We, however, see reflected in the mirror, not the pupil’s awkwardness, but Couperin’s polished, elegant, courtly self. The “ Préludes ” appended to this book were really exercises for pupils; he calls them “ Prose literature of the harpsichord.”

He says that a study of this “ Art of harpsichord playing ” is absolutely indispensable for those who wish to play his pieces in their proper style.

Couperin speaks of Time (*mesure*) and “ Cadence ou Mouvement,” by which he seems to mean phrasing. He says that Italian music does not possess this “ Cadence,” which is really the mind and soul of music. (It is curious that Rameau, too, considered French music expressive and Italian music the reverse).

Couperin says : “ All our violin airs, our Pièces de Clavecin, de violes, etc., seem to express some sentiment. Therefore, as we (the editorial ‘ we ’) have no signs or characters to explain our own ideas, we try to make up for it by placing words such as *Tendrement*, *Vivement*, etc., before our pieces. I wish someone would take the trouble to translate these for the use of foreigners.”

He considered women’s hands far better adapted to the clavecin than men’s, and taught the ladies of his own family to play. His cousin Louise was well known as a performer, (probably “ La Couperin ” was dedicated to her), whilst his daughter Marguérite Antoinette was appointed player at court and musical instructress of the Princesses.

She was, by the way, the first woman to occupy such a position in France.

We get a glimpse of Couperin's temperament in his remark that strong hands, capable of exciting the most rapid and light passages, are not always most successful in pieces requiring tenderness and expression. "I confess that I greatly prefer what touches to what surprises me," he says. This taste is exactly what one would expect in the composer of his exquisite little pieces, so modern in their expressive charm.

He was very fond of his chosen instrument and jealous of its reputation. "The harpsichord-player is the last to be praised for his share in a *concerto*. What injustice! His accompaniment is the foundation of a building, which supports the whole, but of which no one ever speaks!" He recognises its shortcomings however. "The harpsichord is perfect as regards compass and has a brilliance of its own, but as one can neither increase nor diminish its tone, I should be grateful to anyone sufficiently skilful and artistic to render this instrument capable of expression.<sup>1</sup> My ancestors attempted this task apart from their compositions!"

As one of Couperin's nephews married the daughter of a harpsichord maker, it is possible that some of the family were practically interested in clavecin manufacture.

<sup>1</sup> The harpsichord had "a note which no manipulation of the key could prolong or sustain or alter in quality; and the instrument was therefore specially adapted to clear, cold, polyphonic writing, in which the parts moved almost equally well with

French harpsichord music is usually in dance form and most of Couperin's pieces are dances.

He wrote Courantes, Minuets, Chaconnes, Passacaglie, Sarabandes, Gavottes, Giges, grouping them together in *suites* or "Ordres" (as he called them) and dedicating them to great ladies or patrons. He published some twenty-seven of these "Ordre" volumes between 1713-1730. Following the fashion of the day, he bestows descriptive titles on his pieces, and claims to portray in music the characteristics of the "models." The French have always been fond of descriptive music, and in Couperin's pieces they no doubt recognised allusions to persons or to passing events which have lost their meaning for us.

Couperin himself certainly meant them as pictures or portraits. He says in his dedication to the First Book, "I have always had an object in composing all these pieces, inspired by various events; the titles correspond to the ideas I had in my mind; I need not explain them, but as some of the titles may seem to be flattering me,<sup>1</sup> it is perhaps as well to mention that the pieces bearing them are in a way portraits which have sometimes been considered very characteristic when I played them. Most of these pretty titles are bestowed rather on

an almost uniform tone . . . . There were mechanical devices whereby the whole volume of tone could be suddenly increased or diminished; there were none for swelling it by insensible degrees or bringing into prominence some special note of the chord."—Hadow, Oxford History of Music.

<sup>1</sup> " . . . . me flater " (*sic*).

the charming originals whom I wished to portray than on the copies of my making." (This may mean that he designated a lady by a title, dedicating a piece to her?) He adds that he had taken great pains to have the book well printed, sparing neither money nor time, it had taken over a year to produce properly.

Besides the names of fair women there are names of dancers of both sexes (nicknames were given to dancers at that time, such as the Princess, the Bird, the Devil, the Restless One). These have no significance for us, nor can we identify "Fleurie ou la tendre Nanette," "Mimi," or "Soeur Monique" (that especially charming little piece). Names of landscapes are naturally merely titles: Bourbon, Basque, Charleroi. Strange titles suggest character-description: the Enchantress, the Voluptuous Woman, the Lugubrious or Gloomy Woman, the Chatterbox, the Turbulent Man. There are even a Troubled Soul (*Ame en Peine*), a Convalescent, Wandering Shades (*spectres*), Working Women and a March of Men in grey. (*Marche des gris-vêtus*). Whoever the *Gris Vêtus* may have been, their march is to be played "heavily but not slow." *La Lugubre* has heavy chords (in C minor). The Prude is a Sarabande bristling with grace notes and "agréments." . . . *Atalante* is in lightly running passages. A curious title is *Slight Mourning or the three Widows*, not a serious mourning-piece, however, it is in A major and to be played "gracieusement." *The Spinner* (*La Fileuse*), with its

humming accompaniment in the bass, anticipated many modern spinning songs. And Couperin's Bees, Butterflies, Grasshopper, Will o' the Wisp all seem suggestive titles which invite imitation. The *Hunt*, too, offers opportunities for obvious description, so does *Reveille Matin*, with its *fanfares*. The *Eel* seems unique. *Dodo or Love in the cradle* is as tenderly expressive as a modern cradle song.

M. Farrenc, who has published Couperin's "Pièces de Clavecin" in his fine series, "Le Trésor des Pianistes," classifies them in an interesting manner.

La Florentine, la Mylordine, les Papillons, La Lutine, le Carillon de Cythère and Soeur Monique have "charming melodies, graceful and natural."

La Logivière, la Marche des Gris-vêtus, Passacaille, La Superbe, l'Audacieuse, la Visionnaire, "are more interesting in their harmony."

La Voluptueuse, la Lugubre, l'Ame en peine, les Ombres Errantes, la Convalescente, are "very expressive, varied and original." And le Reveille-Matin, la Diligente, la Commère (the gossip), les Tricoteuses (the Knitters), are "vivacious and brilliant."

In some of these musical pieces imitation is quite evident, as in Les Tricoteuses, or the Man with the grotesque Body, who jumps in detached notes, etc.

In these pieces the music is simple. Couperin usually employs two voices, occasionally three, seldom full chords. They are contrapuntal in style;

but the soprano leads the melody and is very richly ornamented with *agréments*, grace-notes, trills, etc., in order to help out the weak tone of the instrument. For the same reason chords in arpeggio are held down by all fingers so that more sound is obtained. He also employs a sign to indicate a phrase, which the performer should make evident. He modulates to the dominant, relative minor and the nearly related keys.<sup>24</sup> Under Couperin the Rondo began to develop from a simple dance form, foreshadowing the Sonata. But the great charm of his music is its expressive quality; in this he far surpasses all his contemporaries, Marchand, Daquin, even Rameau, who wrote some delightful clavecin pieces in *genre* style (*Le Rappel des Oiseaux*, *La Poule*, etc.) These, like Daquin's *Le Coucou*, were cleverly descriptive, but Couperin aimed at psychological portrayal, being, in fact, a forerunner of Schumann. He is the first composer with a definite conscious note of modern expression.

*Les Petits Ages* is a little cycle of four pieces: Muse naissante, Enfantine, Adolescente, Délices.

There is also a Ballet called the *Pomp or Masque of the great and ancient Minstrelsy* (Ménestrandise) with its five acts of descriptive dances, a picture in music of an ancient fair or Masque. It contains the entry of the Notables. The song of Beggars and Hurdygurdy men. The dances of Jugglers and Merry Andrews with bears and monkeys. Duet of the crazy and lame. And in the *finale*, the animals break loose and there is a general stampede.

In *Les Folies Françaises ou les dominos* there are distinct foreshadowings of Schumann's "Carnaval" and "Papillons," psychological characterisation and programme music.

These are twelve very short pieces, a kind of variations on the same harmonic foundation. The titles are the most curious part of them, each domino is supposed to have a different colour: Virginity in a colour which is invisible. Modesty in rose colour. Ardour in red. Hope in green. Faithfulness in blue. Perseverance in grey. Desire in Violet. Coquetry in varied colours. Old gallants in purple. Silent jealousy in purple-grey. Despair and rage in black.

Curious is Couperin's partiality for 'cello effects in such pieces as *La Bandoline* and *Délices*. He evidently was seeking for a more expressive tone than that of the clavecin.

One pictures Couperin at court or in aristocratic salons, stately at the harpsichord, playing his compositions to an appreciative king, with great ladies listening attentively, amused and sometimes flattered by the piquant titles and allusions of his pieces. Or we see him giving excellent lessons to aristocratic pupils, always polished and affable, artist and man of the world. His plump rounded features look calmly prosperous and benign beneath the imposing wig of the period. A touch of cynicism is manifest in the dedication of his first book to a friend (one M. Pajot de Villers), to whom he expresses gratitude. "A man really sensible of



gratitude should be privileged because he is of such a rare species " (en faveur de la rareté de son espèce), therefore may he, Couperin, being grateful, have the privilege of offering this book, etc. . . .

The " engraving " of his works was an anxious matter. One book was delayed for a year, Couperin politely waiting until the " graveur " had finished some Viola compositions by a noted musician, " un des illustres de nos jours," who in his turn had on a former occasion politely waived his claim to the " graveur " in favour of Couperin.

In his quaint spelling he gives the address of the " auteur " as *rue de Poitou en Marais*. In spite of frequent illnesses which also, he says, delayed his compositions, Couperin lived to the age of sixty-five.

His wife was one Marie Anne Ansault, and his two daughters played the organ and the clavecin.

Marie Anne became a nun at the Abbaye of Maubuisson and was organist there, whilst Marguérite Antoinette was the distinguished court claveciniste.

In 1745 the wife claimed and was granted the rights of Couperin's compositions for twelve years after his death.

Louise, the daughter of the earlier François, was born after the removal of the family to Paris (1674) and died at Versailles (1728), having held her Court appointment for thirty years. Besides being a famous claveciniste she was also a talented singer.

Her brother Nicholas had a musical appointment at the Court of Toulouse (1680-1728). He was also



organist of St. Gervais, which seems, in fact, to have been held by all the Couperins in turn. François le Grand occupied the post too, but the date of his appointment is uncertain, as we have seen.

Two sons and a daughter of Nicholas continued the musical traditions of the family, the last of the line being one of these, Gervais François, still living in 1815, but described as of "mediocre" talent. He obtained posts as organist solely on the strength of his illustrious name. The genius of the family was exhausted.

Couperin's four books of *Pièces de Clavecin* appeared in 1713, 1717, 1722 and 1730 respectively.

In his third volume (1722) Couperin essays composing for other instruments besides the clavecin, for violin, flute, oboe, viola and bassoon. There are four of these concerted pieces which he calls "Concerts Royaux," and in the preface he says they were composed expressly for the little chamber concerts at the court on Sundays. Messieurs Duval, Philidor, Alarius and Dubois were the other performers, and Couperin himself played the harpsichord. These pieces have a figured bass, and Couperin adds that he had arranged them according to their tonalities, keeping the titles under which they were first presented to the Court in 1714-1715.

Another volume for various instruments appeared in 1724, called *Les goûts réunis*, containing among others a grand Sonata with Trio entitled *La Parnasse ou l'Apothéose de M. Corelli*.

Other works :

*L'Apothéose de l'Incomparable M. de Lully*,  
undated.

*Trios* for violin ; his book *L'art de toucher le Clavecin* and

*Neuf leçons de Ténèbres à une et deux voix*.

Even in the *Apothéose* of Corelli and Lulli nothing was left to the imagination ; it was all strictly " programme " music. Corelli is received on Mount Parnassus, he drinks of the fount of Hippocrene, expresses his delight, falls asleep to slumber music, and is assigned a place beside Apollo.

On the same lines Lulli arrives in the Elysian Fields and is met by Apollo, who presents a violin to him. The envy of Lulli's contemporaries is supposed to be heard in " subterranean sounds." Corelli welcomes Lulli and they make music together, each alternately leading. Italian and French muses unite in harmonious strains.

Jean Baptiste Loeilly (1660-1728) comes as a connecting link between Chambonnières and Couperin-le-Grand. He composed sonatas of great merit and a suite in G minor. Not succeeding in Paris, he came to England and became rich and famous as Court Director of concerts. He also wrote for the flute and a book of six lessons for harpsichord.

Schobert, the last great French harpsichordist, was a native of Strasbourg (1730-1768). His compositions were well known in England and Holland ; they were chiefly sonatas and his style was different from that of the other clavecinistes, being

richer in harmony. He became harpsichord player to the Prince de Conti.

Other harpsichord composers were Jean Henri D'Anglebert, Court Musician under Louis XIV (1623-1692). Among other works he arranged Lully's airs for harpsichord.

Jean Louis Marchand (1669-1733), Court harpsichord player and organist. He lost the king's favour and was banished for a time. On visiting Dresden during his exile he was invited to take part in a contest of skill with Bach. Both masters played their own compositions and improvised, but Bach was so obviously superior that Marchand left before further comparisons could be made. On returning to Paris he was soon as popular as ever and had many pupils, receiving a *louis d'or* for a lesson, but was so extravagant that he died in poverty. Rameau was his pupil after his return from exile. Marchand composed two books of *Pièces de Clavecin*.

Louis Claude Daquin or d'Aquin (1694-1772), the pupil to whom Marchand gave a post of organist in preference to Rameau. On leaving his post at the Cordeliers, Marchand apostrophised his organ : " Adieu, chère veuve ! d'Aquin seul est digne de toi ! " Besides clavecin pieces, among them " Le Coucou," which is still played, Daquin composed some Noël's and works for other instruments.

Jean François Dandrieu (1684-1740) wrote rustic dances (*Fête de Village*), a Hunting Piece (*chasse*) with descriptive music, and a Battle or War Piece

(*Les Caractères de la Guerre*) in which he imitates the firing of cannon by detached triads.

Rameau's charming *Pièces pour Clavecin* are familiar to all. The titles are all descriptive, some of the less known names are quite on Couperin's lines: "La Boiteuse" (the lame woman), "La Joyeuse," "L'Indifferente," etc. "Les Tourbillons," which Rameau explained as representing whirls of dust raised by wind, is a quaint forerunner of Debussy. "La Rameau" was perhaps his sister, the Claveciniste.

La Fontaine gives a pretty picture of the celebrated clavecin player, Mademoiselle Certain, the friend of Lully (1660-1711). On the way home from church he calls at "the famous Certain's" for a chat.

"In a thousand ways charming, a thousand ways wise,  
Mamselle Certain entrances our hearts and our eyes;  
Her brilliant fingers, her talent so rare,  
Surpass Hardel, les Couperins, Chambonnières.  
This charming girl's harpsichord touches my heart  
More than Isis and all other musical art;  
I ask nothing better, I crave nothing more  
To satisfy ears, eyes and heart in this hour."

"Chez l'illustre Certain faire une station.  
Certain par mille endroits également charmante  
Et dans mille beaux-arts également savante,  
Dout le rare génie et les brillantes mains  
Surpassent Chambonnières, Hardel, les Couperains.  
De cette aimable enfant le clavecin unique  
Me touche plus qu' Isis et toute sa musique  
Je ne veux rien de plus et ne veux rien de mieux,  
Pour contenter l'esprit et l'oreille et les yeux."

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CHAPTER IV

ANDRÉ ERNEST MODESTE GRÉTRY

1741-1813





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1741-1813

ACROSS Grétry's later life, as across the youth of Méhul's fell the shadow of the Revolution. Until middle-age Grétry lived under the old régime, the settled order of things, the conventionalism which had crystallised everything—society, art, morality, into shapes so stiff that they could not change except by being broken. The air of the old régime seems to us heavy and stifling, but with flashes of the coming terrible storm. Under these conditions Grétry lived for his art and achieved fame. Then the storms of the Revolution burst and broke up his world. Everything was changed. But Grétry's nature could not change and his music remained uninfluenced by the passions raging outside art. He lent his genius to the service of the Revolution, it is true, but was not inspired to new strains. He says himself that the Revolution was no time for music or poetry. Poets had no need to write tragedies, "Tragedy walked the streets."

Grétry's music was tender, gay, playful, steeped in domestic sentiment. It appealed to the sentiment-

al side of men like Rousseau and other more terrible Revolutionists and, although his *Richard Coeur de Lion* was sternly prohibited during the Reign of Terror as savouring of Royalty, Grétry himself remained unscathed. The only music really inspired by the Revolution was the immortal *Marseillaise*, rivalled by Méhul's *Chant du Départ*.

Although Grétry was born in Belgium, he is so thoroughly French in language, style, temperament, that one must reckon him as belonging to the land which he adopted in his youth, whatever his ancestry may have been. In the words of a French critic,<sup>1</sup> "Whoever settles in a foreign land and produces creative work in the very spirit of that land, acquires by that fact alone the right of naturalisation." Besides, although Liège had come politically under the Holy Roman Empire, its inhabitants always remained intellectually and morally in sympathy with the Latin (Walloon) race in the Netherlands, and never became really a German province. Neither Teuton language nor Teuton culture ever took root there.

The Grétry family were settled in Liège when André Ernest Modeste (the second child) was born, 11 February, 1741. They have been traced originally to a village of the same name (Grétry), which the grandfather had left for another village (Blégny) near Liège, where he kept an inn. Music was already in the family, for this grandfather used to play for village dances and taught his children

1 M. Bourgault Ducoudray.

music. They formed, in fact, a little orchestra—greatly in request at weddings, dances and *fêtes* generally. François, the father of André, made music his profession and was very successful. He became first violin at the Church of St. Martin in Liège, gave lessons in the best families and married above his own station in life.

André was a delicate child of consumptive tendency, and life was not easy in those first years. His earliest remembrance was of a terrible accident by scalding, which injured his eyesight permanently. After a serious resultant illness he was sent to his grandmother's in the country, always a delightful memory of rustling trees and the music of a bubbling spring of water, which he loved.

But when still quite a child his father apprenticed him as choir boy<sup>1</sup> under a cruel master, and he suffered four or five years of misery. The master over-worked and ill-treated his pupils; "We were all wretched," says Grétry. The smallest fault in singing or unpunctuality in arriving was cruelly punished, and poor little Grétry was so afraid of being late that he would leave home at 3 a.m. in snowy weather and spend a couple of hours sitting on the steps of the church with a lantern to be in time for early mass, a forlorn little figure, half dead with cold and weariness. From this "misery of the inquisition," as he calls it, he was finally delivered by his timidity. He had a beautiful voice,

<sup>1</sup> Choir schools and monasteries were the only Schools of Music then.

but was too shy to sing solos well and the master dismissed him as "incapable."

Very fortunately an Italian Company were performing *Opera bouffe* in Liège just then, and Grétry played in their orchestra for a year. He also took singing lessons from some of these artists, and under the fine old Italian method improved wonderfully. He sang again in choirs and his beautiful voice was greatly admired, but he was forced to sing far too much before his voice broke. One day in an air by Galuppi, with very high notes, he suddenly broke down and began to spit blood. This was the end of Grétry's singing.

He always looked upon music as his vocation. At the time of his first communion, he prayed earnestly that he might either grow up to be "a good man and a great musician," or die. And on the very same day a beam of wood fell upon his head in the church belfry, stunning him. When he recovered consciousness his first words were: "Then I am to be a musician after all." He dreamed above all of dramatic music, for he adored Pergolesi's light opera, probably influenced by the Italian company of operatic singers, but also instinctively, in accordance with his own musical bent.

Then came a period of study: composition for a couple of years with Renekin, an organist, a splendid and enthusiastic teacher; afterwards with one Moreau, less inspiring. Before he was eighteen Grétry had composed six small "Symphonies" and a *Messe Solennelle*, which were well

received in Liège, then, as now, appreciative of musical talent. A certain Canon, delighted with the works, advised a visit to Rome, offering to defray the expenses of the journey. So in 1759 the youthful composer set out for Italy, a journey performed on foot and with haphazard companions. An old pedlar, who concealed his real business of smuggling under the pretence of conducting young students to Italy, acted as guide. A medical student and a delicate young Abbé were of the party, but the Abbé had to turn back after a few days on the road, footsore and worn out with fatigue. After various adventures the medical student and Grétry reached Rome, and both were received in the College liégeois, founded by a native of Liège for poor students. This was behind the Borghese Palace, and conducted by a priest very much on the lines of a *gratis* hostel, students being allowed full liberty in their choice of teachers, etc.

Here Grétry lived for seven years (1759-1766), studying hard all the time, unless interrupted by attacks of illness brought on by hard work. He loved Rome and in after years always advised young artists to spend some time there. He worked under several Roman teachers at the usual routine of fugues, counterpoint, imitations—drudgery which he detested.<sup>1</sup>

At this time there was a decided revolt of the younger generation against the strict rules of coun-

<sup>1</sup> Casali, *maître de chapelle* at St. John Lateran, was his favourite teacher.

terpoint and Grétry felt that much of the teaching was simply wasted time. He was striving to find some new way of expression, even in Liège he had grown weary of the old contrapuntal style, but as yet he was too timid to strike out boldly and throw off conventional traditions. One can dimly feel what courage of conviction was needed, at that particular period of transition, for a young "modern" to declare and realise his aims, to throw overboard the cherished traditions of centuries. Voltaire had truly said that it took a whole generation for the ear to grow accustomed to new combinations of sound. Grétry speaks of his struggles between conventional ideals and the real rules governing art, of "the conflict between taste which chooses carefully and inexperience which does not know how to select." He had not yet realised what his own aims were. Again he was dismissed by one of his teachers as "ignorant and without promise."

No wonder that in later years Grétry warned young artists not to grow discouraged, "for you must travel round an immense circle of curious and incoherent ideas, ever recurring and ever rejected, before you finally perceive the truth you are seeking." Certainly he, as a young artist, had to wade through a mass of contradictions and prejudices before he realised himself and his genius. He loved melody and light opera, but disapproved of the frivolous style of Church music then in vogue. (Burney noted and condemned the use of the

Minuet form in Church music. Jigs, arias and dance tunes of all kinds were used in sacred services). The only music really liked and appreciated by Italian audiences was singing; for the eighteenth century was the period in which the human voice was cultivated to an extraordinary degree. At the opera people only listened to the phenomenal execution of celebrated singers; during the rest of the performance they talked, ate ices, visited each others' boxes, in order to escape boredom.

Grétry took his art very seriously and worked with his usual impetuosity until he brought on a dangerous attack of illness with fever and blood spitting. All his life he remained subject to those attacks and even in Rome he speaks of dieting himself carefully (he considered a diet of dried figs and water good for the chest).

After this illness he was sent to rest and recruit in a hermitage on Monte Mario. In these beautiful surroundings, in solitude and quiet, he grew calm and sure of himself. All at once inspiration came and he composed an air on words by Metastasio, charmed to find that at last he could express his ideas clearly and easily. "Never have I known a more delightful moment," he records.

Soon afterwards he was asked to write music for a two-act piece to be performed during Carnival, and composed *Les Vendangeuses* ("The Harvesters") within a week. It was a great success with public and critics alike. Piccinni congratulated



him on having struck out a new line. The students at the Collège liégeois celebrated their musician's triumph by a gala (1766).

There were flattering invitations to stay in Rome and compose operas. But Grétry was anxious to hear Opéra Comique in Geneva before going on to Paris, his ultimate goal. He felt that his talent lay in light opera. Besides, there was the opportunity of travelling in the *suite* of a certain English nobleman, a musical amateur especially devoted to the flute. (Grétry composed flute concertos for him and also had found a friend in the German flute professor attached to his service). Through this connection he obtained singing pupils in Geneva immediately on arrival and independence was assured. He visited Voltaire, who was living in Geneva at that time, and asked him for a libretto, which however Voltaire refused to undertake. But he welcomed the young man, cordially clasping his hand at their first meeting ("it was my heart he clasped," says the impressionable youth), and was very friendly.

Voltaire was astonished to find so much "ordinary intelligence and such a sense of humour in a mere musician." Evidently Grétry was able to hold his own with the great man. They discussed many things, among others the question, which had been raised lately by the Encyclopædists, of the treatment of the *c* mute in terminations, e.g., in such words as "philosophe." Grétry



thought it should be considered a syllable and have a note of music, whilst Voltaire advised him to keep the *e* mute ("philosoph").

In Geneva Grétry stayed six months and composed *Isabelle et Gertrude* on an old libretto (it was a custom of the day for more than one composer to use the same libretto). This was fairly successful, but Voltaire strongly advised him to go to Paris and seek "immortalité," and in Paris he arrived in the summer of 1767.

Rameau had died three years before and no one had as yet taken his place. At the opera portions of old operas and ballets filled the bills, the singing was quite in the old artificial style. Grétry was disappointed, and disappointed besides in Rameau's music, which seemed to him old-fashioned, out-of-date; but he found some brilliant actors at the Comédie Italienne (Madame Favart, Monsieur Clairval, etc.). And he had the great good fortune to find a friend in the Swedish Ambassador, the Comte de Creutz, a most enthusiastic music-lover.

Creutz became his devoted friend and it was largely owing to his influence and support that Grétry succeeded so soon in making a name. At his house the unknown young musician met the most intellectual and artistic persons: Suard, the Abbé Arnaud, Vernet the painter, and delighted them by his playing on the harpsichord. It was the custom to have music after dinner and Grétry

often played his latest compositions to these appreciative listeners. Among other things in those early days, he played the score of an opera, *Les Mariages Samnites* (libretto by an amateur named Légier). This was performed at the Prince de Conti's but, partly owing to the libretto, was a decided failure. Grétry had now no money left (he had copied the score himself, being too poor to pay for it), criticism was entirely unfavourable, and in his youthful despair he thought seriously of suicide. Creutz, however, acted as guardian angel and persuaded the well-known librettist Marmontel to write a "poem" for him; this time all went well.

*Le Huron* (on an episode from Voltaire's *L'Ingénu*) was performed 20 August 1768, the music being pronounced "charming, natural, sincere," in fact all the criticisms were favourable. Grétry had won fame. Grimm said the success of the opera was entirely due to the music, which was "purely Italian in style, the harmony not too heavy and full" (this was certainly never Grétry's fault). Certain airs caught on and became famous, such as "Dans quel canton est l'Huronie?" The march at the end of Act I. was taken from the unsuccessful *Mariages Samnites*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The score of this opera shows five first and five second violins, two violas, three 'cellos, two contrabassi, two bassoons, two horns, kettledrum, two oboes and two flutes. But as only two artists were provided for these last instruments they always had to be divided into one flute and one oboe, or two flutes etc., never all four together.

This opera, called *Opus 1* (*comédie* in two acts) was dedicated to Count Creutz.<sup>1</sup>

Five months after *Huron* appeared *Lucile*, a one-act opera which scored a tremendous success (5 January 1769), *libretto* again by Marmontel. This opera appealed to popular taste, at that time all for sentiment and sensibility. Rousseau and Diderot wrote, whilst Greuze painted, the charms of Innocence, Simplicity, the Domestic Virtues. Audiences enjoyed shedding facile tears; it was the fashion to be easily moved. *Lucile* is on these lines of simple domestic sentiment.

The idyllic plot resembles the story of "Lord Ronald and Lady Clare." *Lucile*, betrothed to Dorval, finds out that she is not the daughter of the rich Timante, but of Blaise the peasant. She prepares to renounce Dorval, but he will not part from her and his father also generously consents to their union. An "enthusiasm of kindness and virtue," commented the *Mercure*, whilst the music became popular at once. The quartette: "Où peut-on être mieux qu'au sein de la famille?" ("Where is one happier than in the bosom of one's family?"), had a long run of favour, it became in fact a kind of household word and was often played with ludicrous effect. The soldiers of the Republic sang it later on all possible oc-

<sup>1</sup> It is remarkable that *le Huron* was performed in his native town of Liège in January, 1769, only six months after Paris, and the city Magistrates invited Madame Grétry, his mother, to their box. This points to an extraordinary success in those days of slow communication.

casions, when escorting prisoners, for instance, or on taking possession of a city. Even during the terrible retreat from Russia a special guard once surrounded Napoleon at a dangerous moment, playing the familiar air. There is a legend that this air, so often heard in times of storm and stress, was actually sung in church in 1825 to other words, expressive of the happiness of the elect in Heaven!

*Lucile* was all domestic sentiment, but in his next work, *Le Tableau Parlant*, Grétry showed that he could write gay bright music which surprised everyone by its sparkle. This work, composed very quickly on a libretto by Marmontel, was performed 20th September, 1769. Critics compared him with Pergolesi. With this work he became "the father of French light opera."

Grétry had by this solved the question of the *e* mute, which he had discussed with Voltaire, and in this opera he definitely assigns a note to it. ("Je suis jeune, je suis fille"). His music was full of amusing imitations and descriptions, such as a passage in the bass indicating the tottering walk of an old man or the heroine's mimicry of her guardian. The work made him famous. When Burney visited Paris in 1770 he found Grétry the most fashionable composer of comic opera, the idol of the public. Selections from his works were performed at most public receptions and his *scoré* was found on every harpsichord. At this time he was only twenty-eight years of age. There is a

charming portrait of him by Madame Vigée le Brun: a refined, delicate face with regular features, too feminine to be called handsome, but decidedly good looking, the expression dreamy, sensitive, amiable—"un garçon charmant" in the costume of his day, with an air of distinction and elegance. He was delighted to know that he resembled Pergolesi, who was also pale, delicate and of consumptive tendency.

"Let him try to live, if possible," said Grimm, after discovering that Grétry was a genius. And after all this frail being, in spite of ill-health and many trials, attained the ripe age of seventy-two.

Although of humble origin, Grétry's wit, intelligence and charming manners made him at home in grand *salons*. He enjoyed the life of a fashionable artist, in summer invited to aristocratic *châteaux*, in winter to dinners and receptions in town. He made friends among the noted artists, whilst the Encyclopædists, who had fought Rameau, took him under their wing. Diderot was especially friendly to him. At the Abbé Morellet's first Sundays in the month there was always music with the best singers; Philidor,<sup>1</sup> Caillot, Hulmandel the claveciniste, d'Alembert came and Mlle de L'Espinasse, de la Harpe, Mme Vigée le Brun. But Creutz remained his most devoted friend, whose admiration for the young genius was described as almost a "culte religieux." He would sit for

1 Director of *Concerts spirituels* and operatic composer (*Le Sorcier*).

hours in silence, happy to watch him at work and carefully made notes of all words of praise uttered in his honour. If an idea occurred to Grétry, Creutz would hand him paper and pencil and urge him to jot it down at once.

*Silvain* (libretto by Marmontel) was Grétry's next opera, performed 19th February 1770. It was on the domestic sentimental lines of "Lucile," part of the music being again drawn from the unsuccessful *Mariages Samnites*. Another lyric of family affection "Dans le sein d'un père" again pleased popular taste and became celebrated, "almost a classic." The conjugal love of Hélène and Silvain was a theme pleasing to disciples of the Return to Nature and Simple Life school of those days.

On the other hand some rather revolutionary lines displeased the nobles. There was a certain reference to the freedom of hunting, for instance, and lines expressing the beauty of virtue as compared with noble blood,

" Il est bon de montrer quelquefois que la  
simple vertu tient lieu de naissance,"

were not pleasing to aristocratic ears.

At this time Grétry was in love with a young girl named Jeanne Marie Grandon, the daughter of a poor widow in Lyons. She seems to have been alone in Paris earning her living and occupying a room in the house where Grétry lodged. Her father had been an artist, the master of

Greuze. For some time her mother refused to permit the marriage, but finally (November 1770), signed a deed in presence of a notary at Lyons, in which she gave her full consent. Jeanne Marie had nursed Grétry through a severe illness and their marriage took place 3rd July 1771, he being thirty and his wife twenty-four.

Grétry's own mother, now a widow, had come to visit him during his illness and she remained in Paris, living with the young couple for many years, until her death in 1801. Grétry settled a pension of 400 livres a year upon her at the time of his marriage.

In 1770 the marriage of Marie Antoinette with the Dauphin was celebrated. Marmontel was asked by the Duc d'Aumont to write an opera for it with Grétry as composer. Unfortunately Marmontel's libretto, *Zémire et Azor*, so greatly resembled the plot of "La Belle et la Bête" that the Duc d'Aumont feared "the possibility of an epigram." Marmontel had nothing else ready, but, as something had to be produced, Grétry composed two shorter operas, *Les deux Avides* and *Amitié à l'Épreuve* (by unknown librettists) and these, with *Le Tableau Parlant*, were performed at Fontainebleau in October and November.

Grétry was ill at the time and wrote the chorus of Janissaries in the first act of *Les deux Avides* after a night of delirium, during which the music rang in his head until it became a torturing obsession.



The plot and words of these operas are poor, but some of the music is charming. The duet of the two misers, Martin and Gripon, is characteristic<sup>1</sup> and there is some clever descriptive music, for instance, the scratching of a mouse, or when Jerome descends into a well, the violin imitates the cord and the wheel unwinding it, etc. The short march (sung in chorus), "La garde passe, il est minuit," became popular and was used as regimental music, although really not at all martial in character. Grétry received 4,500 livres for this work.

The dauphin hated music and was at no pains to conceal the fact. (He was known to remark after a musical *fête*, "Now the music is over, we can enjoy ourselves"). But Marie Antoinette, devoted to music, was delighted with Grétry's opera. There was even a Royal summons for the composer to appear at Court, and the invalid left his sick bed to obey the command. His reception was not encouraging, the King merely remarking drily that M. Grétry looked very ill.

*Zémire et Azor*, composed meantime, was produced (8th November 1771) at Fontainebleau and a month later in Paris. People insisted on calling it "La Belle et la Bête," (and it undoubtedly is "Beauty and the Beast"), but there was at this moment no royal marriage to furnish the possibility of an "epigram" and Marie Antoinette expressed herself charmed, delighted, she had dreamt of

1 "Nièces, neveux, race haïssable" has an angry, impatient accompaniment expressing the sentiment.



the music. Grétry had dedicated the opera to Madame du Barry and received a pension for it. All the honours of this piece went to the composer. Poor Marmontel, who always fancied that his *libretti* were far superior to Grétry's music, was deeply mortified. Nothing could convince him that he was not the principal collaborator in their productions and when Grétry's music proved to be the real attraction, his jealousy knew no bounds. Marmontel's fatuous belief in his own superior talent is very evident in his complacent version of the success of *Zémire et Azor*:

"I do not deny that the charm of the music contributed wonderfully to such effects. Grétry's in this case was, in my opinion, better than usual; but he never sufficiently appreciated the pains I took to indicate for him the lines and character of easy and pleasing melody. Most musicians are foolish enough to believe they owe nothing to their poet; and Grétry, who was intelligent in other respects, possessed this weakness in a supreme degree."

Next day the guard presented arms to the composer in one of the corridors of the palace at Fontainebleau, and when Grétry said he was mistaking him for a personage of distinction, the soldier replied:

"I heard *Zémire et Azor* yesterday." Grétry was delighted with this spontaneous homage, which he records in his *Memoirs*.

The opera, in four acts, described as a "Comédie

ballet en vers," was, in fact, founded on the old fairy tale. Azor was, however, not intended by Marmontel to be an animal, and he was horrified (as was also the singer) by the costume designed by the tailor for the part. It was hastily altered under Marmontel's personal supervision into an elegant costume with a cloak of purple satin and a mask.

*Zémire* remains one of Grétry's famous compositions. The *Mercur*e praised the trio *en sourdine* of the father and two daughters, who appear in a magic picture (for which Marmontel ordered two ells of silver moire and two ells of fine gauze, as appears in items of theatrical expense). The air for the slave is a good example of Grétry's musical jokes. The slave assures his master that the storm is over, in order to get him away from Azor's mysterious palace. "Already the winds are at rest, the storm is over," he sings, whilst the orchestra breaks out with fresh violence to show that the storm is still raging. Grétry made the slave yawn so realistically that the audience yawned too, a device condemned as beyond the legitimate province of music. When the father bewails the absence of *Zémire* "mysterious music" is heard, produced by two horns, two clarionets and two bassoons behind the scenes.

Like Rameau, Grétry aimed at "La Vérité dans la déclamation." Whilst writing the father's song he declared he had twice tried in vain to express the words naturally and, on shewing his airs to Diderot, he too found the music unsatisfactory. Diderot

recited the words aloud and Grétry then wrote the song according to Diderot's inflections. The result was a complete success. But Grétry admits that this method would not succeed in every case. "Only the spontaneous inspiration of a man like Diderot could give worthy expression."

Marmontel and Grétry now revised *L'ami de la Maison* and it was performed successfully at the Comédie Italienne in May, 1772.

Grétry about this time found a more sympathetic librettist in Sedaine, who provided him with *le Magnifique*, founded on a story by La Fontaine. This Opera Comique in three acts (Paris, 4 March, 1773) was not a brilliant success, but enjoyed rather a long run in spite of intrigues against it by Marmontel and his friends, furious at Grétry's preference of Sedaine. The only really interesting scene is one known as that of the Rose, in which Grétry finds opportunity for delicate shades of emotion. The heroine, Clémentine, has a scene with her lover, but is forbidden to speak to him, her guardian being present to watch the lovers. The pleading of the lover, the triumph of the guardian and Clémentine's emotions are variously expressed by the music. Finally she drops a rose, a token to her lover, without speaking.

*La Fausse Magie*, Marmontel's libretto (1 March 1775), contained a few charming airs and some curious descriptive music. It pleased the public and its success was durable, for it was performed at intervals during a period of nearly twenty years.

It was again the music rather than the stupid plot which made the work successful, and Grétry thought the first act on the whole the best among his works. It was after this opera that Grétry met Rousseau, whom he had long admired from afar. Rousseau was delighted with his music and the two started to walk home together after the performance, conversing amicably. But when they came to some *débris* of building materials, Grétry offered to help the philosopher over the rough places. To his surprise Rousseau pushed him away in a sudden fit of irritability, saying, "Let me do it by myself." They continued the walk in silence, then separated, and never met again.

*La Rosière de Salency*, a pastoral, was performed uneventfully at Fontainebleau (1773); and at Versailles at the close of the same year, in honour of the marriage of the Comte d'Artois, Louis XV's grandson, *Céphale et Procris*. This time MarmonTEL was again in collaboration with Grétry and, as usual, sure that his *libretto* was a masterpiece. But neither words nor music pleased the public, although the music was pronounced by a noted singer (Mlle Sophie Arnould, who sang Procris at its first performance) "more French than the words." As for the words, their banality may be gauged by Céphale's apology for having killed Procris :

Pardonne, hélas ! pardonne  
A l'erreur de ma main.

To which Procris replies :

Tu m'aimais, je pardonne  
A l'erreur de ta main.

Only one performance of this took place at Versailles (30 Dec. 1773). There was much adverse criticism of the music. La Harpe pronounced it feeble. Mlle. de Lespinasse, who had been so enthusiastic over Grétry's previous works, thought it "rather anæmic" and said Grétry should always keep to his pleasing, sensitive, "spirituel" style, and not attempt more. Some of his best airs, however, are in this opera, the duet in Act I and the chorus in Act III.

The story is based on the legend of Cephalus and Procris, but in the opera Procris, after being slain by her lover, is brought to life again by Amor, who descends from the clouds for the purpose.

At this impressive moment a "celestial symphony" is heard (consisting of four common chords), the terrified demons remain "*en attitude* on the crescendo note" (the G minor chord), then rush away in scale passages (*presto*).

The orchestra, a typical one, consists of kettle-drum, trumpet, horns, oboes and flutes, clarinets, violins, violas, 'cello, bassoon.

Gluck was now in Paris, and his stronger genius became a touchstone on which those of lesser calibre were tried and found wanting. Already comparisons were made between him and Grétry. It was unfortunate for Grétry at this time of transition,

when people were vaguely yearning for some newer and truer expression in art as in life, that the singers still kept to their absurd conventional costumes and manner of singing. They were given to loud outbursts followed by trivial little roulades and all sorts of ornamentation (so detested by Lully), and paid no attention to the conductor, being loftily independent of time. Gluck had great difficulty in reforming this state of things, but his strong will prevailed.

In his memoirs Grétry gives an amusing account of the pretensions of singers at the opera.

It was a recognised state of things that, excepting for dances and chorus, there should be no insistence on strict time at the opera. At the rehearsal of *Céphale et Procris* Mlle. Levasseur, the *prima donna*, attacked Francœur, the conductor.

"What is the meaning of this? Your orchestra seems to be in a state of rebellion."

"Rebellion, mademoiselle, how so? We are all here to serve the king and we serve him zealously."

"I should wish to serve him too, but your orchestra interrupts me and prevents my singing."

"Yet, mademoiselle, we are keeping time."

"Time! What nonsense is that? Take your time from me, sir, and know that your symphony is the very humble servant of the artiste who recites."

"When you recite, I follow you, mademoiselle, but you are now singing an air in time, very strict time."

"Enough of this nonsense, take your time from me."

No wonder Grétry complained of the constant "syncopations" introduced by singers of both sexes in his melodies.

Grétry now produced his early opera *Les mariages Samnites* with some new material (12 June 1776). Marie Antoinette attended the first performance, but it was only a mediocre success, a fate shared by several of his works during the next couple of years. In other countries his operas were going the rounds,—in Germany, Sweden, Italy, Russia, Holland, Flanders. But in Paris Gluck's operas took first place and Grétry found his *Céphale* only billed on Sundays, then, as now, the *bourgeois* holiday when people of quality stayed at home.

In 1778 fortune smiled again, the result of collaboration with a more original poet. It was a young Englishman named Hale,<sup>1</sup> who wrote the clever libretto of a different style from anything Grétry had yet composed. *Le jugement de Midas* scored a success, first at court and afterwards in Paris. In this work Grétry cleverly parodies old French music: Pan represents the vulgar old-fashioned Vaudeville, whilst Marsyas stands for classic Grand Opera. There are curious and interesting descriptive episodes. The Overture (programme music) depicts "the silent sound which heralds dawn," followed by a realistic storm; "Apollo falls from heaven."

<sup>1</sup> Known in France as Hèles.



*Les fausses Apparences ou l'Amant jaloux* (also by Hale) was another success both at Versailles (20 November) and at Paris (23 December, 1778). La Harpe placed it in the first rank of French *Opéra Comique* of the eighteenth century. Yet only the Serenade of the second Act (for two violins, two mandolines and 'cello) is at all known now. Mozart admired and even imitated this work. He heard Grétry's operas when he visited Paris, bought the score and studied them attentively.

It was unfortunate that Hale died young, much to Grétry's regret. Their last collaboration was in *Les évènements imprévus*, in the style of Italian comedies of intrigue, which offered Grétry the opportunities he loved of depicting conflicting sentiments. This was performed at Versailles 11 November 1779, and in Paris two days later.

Several smaller works followed with no great success. It was the time of the war of Gluckistes *versus* Piccinnistes. Grétry knew he could not hope to rival Gluck, yet he thought that on his own lines of "sensibility" he might hold his own. Somewhat unwisely, he refused to welcome Piccinni when that master came to Paris, and naturally this offended the Piccinnistes, who more than once hissed his operas. *Colinette à la Cour ou la Double Épreuve* (libretto by Lourdes de Santerre) was popular (1 Jan. 1782). It was a pastoral with pretty dances and chorus and some of Grétry's fresh, spontaneous melodies.



*La Caravane du Caire*<sup>1</sup> a spectacular production with Egyptian colouring, then a novelty, achieved a popular success in Paris (15 January 1784). The Gluckistes approved of it, whilst the Piccinnistes behaved so badly at one performance that they had to be ejected. Within a fortnight the opera was parodied—sufficient proof of its success.<sup>2</sup> The “Opéra ballet” with its Oriental scenery (a bazaar scene was a picturesque novelty) contained some original music, two airs for bass being especial favourites. *The Caravane* held its own on the French stage for a long time, five hundred and six performances being given down to 1829, and Grétry made a fortune from this work.

*Panurge dans l'île des Lanternes* (25 January 1785) was condemned for its *libretto* (taken from Rabelais), although the music ranks among Grétry's best. The great Vestris saved it by his dancing. Grétry, by the way, made a curious innovation by repeating the overture at the end of the opera and having it danced.

About this time the Operatic Committee awarded a pension of 3,000 livres to composers of six great works. Grétry received 2,000 livres for five masterpieces (among which were counted *Zémire*, *Colinette*, *La Caravane* and *Panurge*), another 1,000 was promised when he should complete another work.

1 The “book” was by the Comte de Provence, afterwards Louis XVIII.

2 In the parody Florestan, the father, arrives in a balloon to rescue his son, a topical allusion to the balloon experiments then being carried out in France.

At this time Grétry was at the height of his fame and fortune. Besides revenues from his works he enjoyed several pensions (one granted by Louis XV and increased by Louis XVI, and one from the Opera); he held various posts, such as Inspecteur de la Comédie italienne and a sinecure, created expressly for him, Censeur royale de la musique. This was a court appointment, he had refused others on account of his delicate health. A street in Paris bore his name. His works were almost daily on the repertoire, and he might be seen nearly every evening in the box which the Comédie italienne had presented to the Grétry family. At this time he was living in the rue Poissonnière.

At the age of forty-five Grétry had composed some twenty-five operas, most of which had been successful. His home life with a devoted wife and three charming daughters was happy, his circle of friends included all the noted men and women of Paris. He was fond of spending the summer in a small house at Auteuil, the summer suited him and was "good for composing," he said. Undeniably he composed too much and with too great facility. It is curious that Marie Antoinette, always a friend of Grétry, was really growing a trifle weary of his music and was frankly bored by his *Epreuve villageoise* (performed at Court 24 June 1784). She tried to conceal the fact, but it could not escape the sensitive Grétry and, whether from pique or policy, he took care not to force his music upon her. He went less frequently to Court

(where his presence was required as director of the Queen's private concerts). Marie Antoinette noticed his absence and reproached him.

"I ventured to tell her that, as I was tired of my own music, she must certainly have had enough of it and I praised the 'Bouffons italiens,' whom she favoured just then. . . . She saw I understood and remained kindly disposed towards me—at a distance—but she would soon have disliked me if I had insisted on trying to please her."

Thus Grétry—as an accomplished courtier and man of the world. He kept the Queen's friendship and she was always particularly fond of his third daughter, Marie Antoinette, her godchild. On entering her box at the opera, after bowing to the audience the three times prescribed by etiquette, the Queen's eyes always sought her goddaughter and she would smile and blow a kiss to the young girl, to the delight of the spectators.

The tragedy of Grétry's life was the loss of his three daughters, one after another, each one as she reached womanhood.

Jeanne, called familiarly Jenny, the eldest, quiet and nun-like, died of decline when she was sixteen (about 1787). Lucile Dorothée, the second, full of life and restless energy, the image of her father, had unusual musical talent and composed a little opera, when she was only fourteen ("Le mariage d'Antonio," performed in 1786, retouched and orchestrated by Grétry). Unfortunately she died, as her sister had done, in the spring of 1790.

She had married early and her marriage was an unhappy one. Her husband treated her badly and her parents were doubly wretched, knowing this and unable to help her.

There remained only Marie Antoinette, the Queen's goddaughter, prettiest and youngest of the sisters. She was betrothed when quite young,<sup>1</sup> but after a boating accident in which she and her father were nearly drowned, she developed the same fatal illness and died as her sisters had done. Grétry was composing *Guillaume Tell* at the time and, to please her, his spinet was placed near her bed, so that she could watch him at work, "At last," he says, "she closed her beautiful eyes and went to her sisters."

The parents were heart-broken. Grétry describes how they tried to comfort each other, the wife forcing herself to take an interest in her painting (she had some artistic talent), Grétry busy with his music which, he sadly says, could not console him for the loss of his dear ones. Fame was but an empty name compared with the "real happiness" of family affection. They could not bear to stay in the house where they had lived with their children and removed to the Boulevard des Italiens.

*Richard Cœur de Lion*, by some critics considered Grétry's finest work, was performed in October 1784. The libretto by Sedaine was on the story of Richard I. and his minstrel Blondel. This

<sup>1</sup> To Bouilly, the young poet, librettist of "Pierre le Grand," etc.

was perhaps Grétry's culminating success, although at its first representation the public was not satisfied with the *dénouement*, which was altered and in part re-written. For the air, "O Richard, O mon roi!" Grétry had ransacked old music to find a suitable style, which should at the same time please modern taste. He produced one which became very popular, so much so that during the Revolution it was forbidden as savouring too much of royalist sentiments.

Grétry wrote one more opera founded on royal traditions: *Pierre le Grand* (libretto by Bouilly), produced 13 January 1790, at the Théâtre Italien. This was the last opera of monarchical tendency before the Revolution. It contained flattering allusions to Louis XVI, which were enthusiastically received by the audience. Necker was recognised in Lefort, the friend and counsellor of Peter the Great, and Mme. de Staël personally thanked composer and librettist for their work.

But *Guillaume Tell* (Sedaine) was more appropriate to the times. It appeared 9th April, 1791 (not long after the death of Grétry's youngest daughter), and was a popular success, "breathing" (said the *Journal de Paris*), "hatred of oppression and love of liberty." Meantime the day of the Revolution had dawned. The theatres were closed one evening<sup>1</sup> by angry crowds because Necker was banished, then came the taking of the Bastille and ten days later the opera re-opened with benefit

<sup>1</sup> 12 July, 1789—Grétry's *Aspasie* was to be performed at 5 p.m.

performances (*Panurge*) "in aid of the workmen who had fought for Liberty and la Patrie" (21st, 26th and 29th July, 1789).

A couple of unsuccessful operas and a "Romance of the Willow," written for the tragedy of *Otello*, bring Grétry's works down to November, 1792. The Romance was very popular and was subsequently arranged for voice accompanied by guitar, harp or harpsichord, published by "citizen Grétry."

In February of that year, however, the opera *Richard Cœur de Lion* had been forbidden, so was *Pierre le Grand*, and any theatre producing works "calculated to revive the superstition of royalty" was closed, "the directors to be punished with the utmost rigour of the law."

In Grétry's *Memoirs* he mentions an instance of the fanatical hatred of that "superstition." An unfortunate parrot had his neck wrung for singing "Richard, O mon roi," an air he had learnt in days when there was still a king in France. Patriots burned the score of *Richard* in a café. "I heard the following at a sitting of the National Convention: 'You say, Citizen, that this man is not an aristocrat! And yet he was heard singing that infamous air, "O Richard!"' " Strange to say, the composer himself was not attacked, but he was ordered to write music for the infamous "Fête de la Raison" (a one-act piece, words by Silvain Maréchal). This was composed in 1793, but was not performed until 2nd September 1794

(16 Fructidor, An II. of the Republic). Certain scenes in this work were forbidden by the Censor on the ground of impropriety and its name was altered to *La Rosière Republicaine*. The original scenes must have been of extraordinarily degrading character to be condemned at this period of license and the work as it actually appeared has been described as "a nameless insult to the Catholic religion." Women are represented falling asleep as they recite their *Ave Maria* at the church doors; then the scene changes and the Goddess of Reason appears on an altar; a curé tears up his breviary and dons the Red Cap, nuns join in a frenzied dance. . . . To such compositions was Citoyen Grétry reduced. His Memoirs say very little about his share in such works, nor is it clear how he escaped suspicion when some of his operas were considered so dangerous. His reputation as a musician would not have saved him, but his former known sympathy with the Encyclopædists, his friendship with Diderot, D'Alembert, Voltaire, may have kept him secure. Of course he lost his position, his pensions and other sources of income. For a time none of his operas were performed, he was neglected in favour of newer and more forceful composers, Méhul and Cherubini for instance. He was certainly reduced to poverty. There exists a little book in his handwriting which shows this convincingly enough. He sold jewels, trinkets, a piano, "to live and pay some debts," whilst his wife tried to earn money by painting. This was



in the second year of the Republic. Yet the government seems to have had a great respect for Grétry's talent. When the Conservatoire de Musique was founded, he was appointed "Inspecteur des Etudes" (Director of Studies), with Gossec, Méhul, Lesueur and Cherubini.<sup>1</sup> Also he was one of the three chosen to represent music at the Institut de France, with Gossec and Méhul. This was in 1795. But his health was now too delicate for any active work, and he resigned the former post in the following year, retiring to L'Ermitage at Montmorency, once the home of J. J. Rousseau, where he spent the remainder of his life.

Napoleon made him member of the Legion of Honour (19th May, 1802), granted him a pension to make up what he had lost, and spoke in flattering terms of his music in a personal interview.

Grétry certainly had to write to order during the Revolution. He says: "I wrote *Guillaume Tell* at Sedaine's request; my other works, such as *Barra*, which was performed at the *Italiens*, *la Rosière Républicaine* and *Denis le Tyran* at the Opera, were "commanded" by the terrible tyrants

<sup>1</sup> Gossec had founded an "Ecole de declamation et de Chant" in 1784, and Sarette (originally a Captain of the Guard) set up a School for Military Music, in which bandsmen were trained for the army (1790). From these beginnings came the "Institut National de Musique" (1793), changed to "Conservatoire de Musique" (1795). Some 600 students, male and female, came from all parts at once. The instruction was always gratis. Sarette was the first director.



of those days. Another revolutionary drama, whose title I forget,<sup>1</sup> was set to music in two days by all the composers in Paris. The terrible committee of Public Safety commanded the performers; all the numbers intended for singing were put into one red cap, the names of the composers into another, then the scrutineers decided which piece each one was to compose during the day.

"This musical medley was not a success. An extraordinary effect was produced at the first performance. The overture had been assigned to Blasius, first violin of the opera and a good composer. My air, 'O Richard, O mon roi,' as is well known, was forbidden during the Revolution, it became a death song for him who dared to sing it. . . . The overture of Blasius commenced with this very air. A shudder went through the audience, who rose with one accord on hearing these unexpected strains; the orchestra stopped, there was an alarming silence, until the music continued with the refrain of the Marseillaise, 'Qu'un sang impur arrose nos sillons.' Then came a burst of applause as the composer's intention was revealed."

He goes on to say that music can only flourish in peaceful times. "Music had its cradle in the time of Lulli. Gluck and I (I venture to think) furthered its progress because we were dramatic. . . . Generally speaking, my music was thrown aside during the Revolution; the sentiments ex-

<sup>2</sup> *Le Congrès des Rois.*

pressed by it were too moderate; it was not in harmony with the unrest in men's minds; besides, the life of ancient times depicted in my poems was forbidden. I have my revenge to-day (year XIII., 1805); my works are revived with success."

*La Rosière Republicaine*, The Planting of the Tree of Liberty, was a piece in one act, the poem by Mahéault, clearly an "occasional" work. It is impossible that Grétry contributed willingly to such compositions, but, had he refused, he would have been "suspect" and not even his genius could have saved him. Although he makes only slight allusions to these productions, he is careful to point out that among his collaborators were such famous men as Méhul, Cherubini, Kreutzer, Delayrac, Solié, Catel, Berton, Devienne, Jadin, Blasius and Deshayes. All these names were drawn from the red cap to assist in the *Congrès des Rois*, a production offered *gratis* by the Government to the good citizens of Paris February 26th 1794. It is described as a set of caricatures without rhyme or reason, ending in a *Carmagnole* danced by red-capped kings.

Grétry's other quite numerous works during the Reign of Terror (1792-1796) were not successful or important. The operas were all failures—most of them unpublished. *Joseph Barra*, one of these, contained little of interest, "only one chorus, new and pleasing—too little for Grétry," was the admonishing comment of the *Decade Philosophique*.

*Callias ou Amour et Patrie*, libretto by Hoffmann on a Greek subject, obtained a short success. The

sacrifice of a son by his father to save their country was certainly a more dignified theme than other works of this period. It was coupled on the bills with a *Hymne à l'Eternel*, "with guitar accompaniment" (19th September 1794).

*Anacréon* (1797) was the best of his later works—Grétry's swan song.

Grétry's pictures of those days are unforgettable. Chronicled in the simplest language, they give vivid, indelible impressions. The alarm bell haunted him sleeping and waking. Past his windows defiled the procession conveying Louis XVI to the guillotine (to a terrible march in 6/8 time, played in a curious, uneven rhythm by the soldiers). And there is his well-known description of the evening when, returning from a walk to the Champs Elysées to see an unusually beautiful lilac-bush in bloom, he came to the Place de la Republique and heard music and dancing, whilst beyond and above the merry-makers loomed the ominous guillotine, the dread knife rising and falling a dozen times without pause. Filled with horror, Grétry hurried down a side street, only to meet the cart conveying the headless corpses through noisy crowds. "Peace, citizens," the driver said, laughing, "they sleep!"

In his later years Grétry turned from music to literature in a curious way. He had begun to write his *Essais* before the revolution broke out and continued writing to the end of his life. He neither understood nor liked the new school of music which

was now being recognised; it was stronger, with richer harmony and fuller instrumentation than the old. Grétry was now decidedly of the old school and recognised that he could not go with the times.<sup>1</sup> Since the loss of his daughters, his genius had seemed shattered, and as years went on he actually lost interest in music.

“I say frankly, whether it is because I am older, or because republics are not favourable to illusions, music interests me less to-day than formerly. The language of music seems to me too vague; now that I am on the threshold of old age I want something more positive. Men of all ages are fascinated by the arts, but the creation of works of genius is only proper to the years when imagination and its sweet illusions are in full force. It is time for me to retire and take philosophy or reason, which are one and the same thing, for my portion.”

“Melodies come to an end like everything else; I will not wait until there is nothing left in my wallet.”

All his life Grétry was intelligently interested in art, philosophy, politics; he had learnt much from the Encyclopædists. The first volume of his *Memoirs or Essays on music* appeared in 1789 and contained many personal reminiscences; it was

<sup>1</sup> “My colleagues agree with me that the harmony of to-day is terribly complicated. Singers and instrumentalists are too rapid, they spoil music. We are in fact on the verge of chaos.” Music was also too loud, “since the taking of the Bastille, French music is all cannon-firing.”

reprinted with additions in 1797 at the expense of the State. Evidently the republican government attached importance to Grétry's writings.

Four years later appeared his *La Vérité*—"Truth, what we were, what we are, what we ought to be," in which Citoyen Grétry rather vaunts his republican sentiments. He disapproves of the Reign of Terror, however (by this time it was safe to do so), and preaches moderation, tolerance, unity among nations and all other virtues. It is idle to speculate as to Grétry's real sentiments regarding royalty or republicanism. He lived under both systems and under neither dared he express himself with absolute frankness. Probably he remained true to himself all through, a man of moderate opinions who only wished to live and work in peace.

With the exception of two or three unimportant operas, with only mediocre success, the occupation of Grétry's last years was literature. He left eight volumes entitled *Reflexions d'un solitaire*, some of which have never been published.

He had bought the Ermitage near Montmorency, the home of Jean Jacques Rousseau, and here his last years were spent. Many of the friends of former days were dead—Vernet, Marmontel, Sedaine, Favart, d'Alembert, Greuze—but a new circle formed around the celebrated old composer. Among these came Rouget de Lisle, David the painter, Delayrac, Boieldieu, who lived near Montmorency, Bouilly (to whom his youngest daughter had been betrothed) and others.

Grétry's wife died 1807 and after her death he composed only a few notes.

In August, 1813, he became ill during a visit to Paris and hastened back to die at his beloved Ermitage. His old attacks of hemorrhage came on violently and he died, 24th September 1813, in the arms of his nephew, at the age of 72 years and a half.<sup>1</sup>

Paris gave him a magnificent funeral, at which Méhul pronounced the oration. All the musicians came to take part in the procession and do him honour, silent crowds lined the streets as the *cortège* passed to Père la Chaise. His operas were performed at the theatres for several days to the exclusion of all others.

Weber's criticism of Grétry is worth recording. He wrote in 1817: "Grétry is perhaps the only one among French composers whose spirit is essentially lyric, at times even romantic. It would be impossible to equal the really exquisite purity of his melodies, which are always inspired to suit the exigencies of the moment and not according to stereotyped forms."

Lully and Rameau had sought the true expression of emotion in *recitative*. Grétry sought it in melody. "The most skilful musician is he who can best transform declamation into melody." He

<sup>1</sup> Grétry had generously provided for the seven children left by his elder brother. A niece married one Flamand (he took the name of Flamand Grétry) who had an unseemly lawsuit with the town of Liège for the possession of Grétry's heart.

thought "spoken words are sound in which song is enclosed," and "vocal music is never good unless it copies the accents of the spoken word; without this it is only a symphony." He tried to copy spoken accents in his music, noted tones, inflections, modulations of voice, etc., sometimes, in his efforts after strict truthfulness, becoming trivial and mechanical. Strange irony of fate, Méhul declared that Grétry, writing on the system "*La vérité dans la déclamation*" wrote very well, but it was not music!

But his ideal of melody was really higher than this. "The melody which lingers in one's mind like beautiful poetry bears the mark of genius. All other music, however well written, is only a good arrangement of notes."

He knew his own limitations. "I received from Nature the gift of appropriate melody, but she denied me that of strict and complicated harmony."

The Great Composer, he felt, would be he who should write melody and harmony in equal measure. "But it is very difficult to find such a one!"

His admiration of Haydn was unbounded; Haydn's music he considered an inexhaustible treasury of melodic themes. Mozart admired Grétry, but Grétry does not seem to have recognised Mozart's genius.<sup>1</sup>

He took a great interest in young composers,

<sup>1</sup> He criticised Mozart as "placing his pedestal on the stage and his statue in the orchestra."



“my legatees,” and was always ready to help them. “He consoles me for growing old,” he would say of a young artist of promise. Above all things he warned them not to be afraid of striking out into new paths. “If you can only express your ideas by making use of unaccustomed combinations, do not be afraid of enriching theory by a new rule; others will use your licence, perhaps in a better way than you have done, and thus force the most strict theorists to adopt it. . . . Everything is permissible to the artist who can really grasp Nature, the 24 scales are only the painter’s palette: to forbid his blending the colours is foolish; it is forbidding him to be original.”

His saying about Selection in art is one of his best. “A useless beauty is a harmful beauty. The great task of art is to determine the place which everything should occupy.” He had some pupils, among them a Madame de Baur, who has described his way of teaching. He would not undertake the technical part, leaving that to other masters, and devoting himself to interpretation and expression. Conscious of his own short-comings in technical knowledge, he advised pupils to study harmony seriously, “for now,” he said, “we must *know*.” He would illustrate his theories by composing melodies himself.<sup>1</sup> In the last years of his life, everything connected with music excited him terribly; he followed a performance with such intense interest that it exhausted him. Formerly he

1 He wrote “L’Art de Préluder” (1802) for his pupils.



had been a brilliant talker, but in these last years conversation was too great an effort and fatigued him too much. He grew silent and was seldom known to laugh, although he smiled readily. This was all that remained of the gay humour of former years, when he had always been ready with repartee or joke, as for instance, when he replied to a snub about his conversation: "I am a musician; I can adapt myself to any tone." Or when he told a *Curé*: "I will not be buried in your churchyard, your bells are out of tune." Grief at the loss of his daughters and the terrible scenes of the Revolution had shattered him completely. No wonder he could no longer compose.

Grétry composed some fifty operatic works, but most of these were only of ephemeral interest. About half a dozen stood the test of revivals.<sup>1</sup> In comparing the enormous number of works turned out so easily, often at short notice, by these earlier musicians with the few masterpieces produced by modern composers, such as Wagner, one understands how such facility was possible. There was nothing like the deeply thought out, coherent artistic scheme of the modern music drama. The primitive style of instrumentation, the simplicity of the score, the well-worn lines of conventional routine, all favoured the quick throwing together of compositions often merely of "occasional"

<sup>1</sup> *Zémire et Azor* was last performed 1862, *Le tableau parlant* 1865, *Richard* as late as 1897. Several had to be re-orchestrated—*Richard* by Adam, *L'épreuve Villageoise* by Auber.

*raison d'être*. Many of Grétry's works were composed and produced in haste, then, after a failure, they were re-modelled, perhaps with new material.

The well-known criticism that "you could drive a coach and six between Grétry's bass and his first violins" shows the weakness of his score. His gift was for easy, spontaneous, trivial melodies which caught popular taste, and he showed originality in making the orchestra describe, comment upon, underline, as it were, the situations. In his *Richard Cœur de Lion* he even uses Blondel's melody as a kind of *leit motiv* which returns in various forms throughout the opera, and he explained that this melody is the pivot on which the whole opera turns.

Grétry's *Memoires ou Essais sur la Musique*, published 1789, were reprinted in An. V of the Republic by Order of the Government. He says that after 1789 "there was no real musical evolution in France. Composers, each according to his talents, made experiments on every tone, in every style. At the height of the political revolution music sought expression in desperate accents; as the storm grew calmer, music became more human; a lower pitch was used, the diminished seventh lost its importance; during the Terror it was only used to express rage, to-day it expresses tenderness and grief."<sup>1</sup>

"Music may be taken as a fairly good ther-

<sup>1</sup> Rameau, however, long before this said the diminished Seventh was suitable for "Plaintes Tendres."

mometer of Manners (*mœurs*), as the Exchange marks the scale of public credit and the greater or less degree of confidence among merchants. Not only were the harshest discords in vogue during the revolutionary crisis, but the pitch of orchestras and wind instruments rose considerably; piano manufacturers adopted the same pitch to the detriment of the human voice; screaming took the place of singing,<sup>1</sup> the finest voices soon lost their softness and flexibility and became out of tune. My musical compositions of this date were more moderate than most in this respect; whilst conforming to the order of the day, I took a pleasure in showing up its abuses and used softer *nuances* as far as possible." Like Rameau he speculated about music as a means of expression. Not only sorrow and joy, but such emotions as anger, jealousy, shame, may be expressed in music. Even friendship, sarcasm or flattery may be rendered. And like Rameau (but not in agreement with his conclusions) he analyses the characteristics of the different scales and the emotional quality of instruments: the clarinet and the bassoon are sad, the oboe is rustic. Even in merry music the clarinet is sad; "if I had to dance in prison I should choose a clarinet to play the tune." The colours of notes interested him, too, and he anticipated the idea of the Colour Scale and of Music in Medicine.

He had an inventive mind and imagined a kind

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps referring to the huge choral compositions and orchestras introduced by Méhul in public festivals.

of metronome for rhythm, also a musical barometer with a merry air for fine weather and a sad one for gloomy days.

The writing of his "Memoires" (three volumes) was doubtless a great mental resource in later years. He had always been an interested and intelligent observer of men and things, and intercourse with the Encyclopædists developed his bent towards reflection and literary expression. He found refuge and consolation in his diaries, notes and essays. He reveals himself, Grétry the man, as naïve, sincere, kindly, writing sometimes in the stilted elegance of the day, sometimes with absolute simplicity, evidently always enjoying his philosophical reflections and speculations. He unburdens his soul about the unsympathetic nature of Marmontel at some length, laments the hardships of an artist's career, which often interfere with happiness in family life and concludes that the only real happiness consists in living for others and sacrificing one's self for them.

He dreams of a theatre of the future which is astonishingly like Bayreuth. "I should like the theatre to be small, holding 1,000 persons at most; with only one class of seats everywhere: no boxes. I would have the orchestra concealed, so that neither musicians, lights nor music-stands should be visible to the audience. The effect would be magical. . . . A circular hall rising in tiers forming a simple amphitheatre decorated only by frescoes." He foresees that all accessories foreign to

the "poem" must be got rid of. "The ornamental singers will be banished from theatres to concert halls: *roulades* will seem so ridiculous that no one will sing them save those who wish to imitate the nightingale. There are also orchestral abuses which must be abolished."

## WORKS BY GRÉTRY

The first three were written before he came to Paris.

- |       |   |              |
|-------|---|--------------|
| 1766. | Les Vendangeuses                                    | } Destroyed. |
| 1767. | Isabelle et Gertrude                                |              |
| 1768. | Les Mariages Samnites. (Légier) (re-written later). |              |
| 1769. | Le Huron. (Marmontel).                              |              |
|       | Lucile. (Marmontel).                                |              |
|       | Le Tableau Parlant. (Anseaume).                     |              |
| 1770. | Silvain. (Marmontel).                               |              |
|       | Les deux Avars. (F. de Falbaire).                   |              |
|       | L'Amitié à l'épreuve. (Favart).                     |              |
| 1771. | L'Ami de la Maison. (Marmontel).                    |              |
|       | Zémire et Azor. (Marmontel).                        |              |
| 1773. | Le Magnifique. (Sedaine).                           |              |
|       | La Rosière de Salency. (M. de Pézay).               |              |
|       | Céphale et Procris. (Marmontel).                    |              |
| 1775. | La Fausse Magie. (Marmontel).                       |              |
| 1776. | Les Mariages Samnites. (Du Rozoy).                  |              |
| 1777. | Matroco. (Laujon).                                  |              |
| 1778. | Les 3 Ages de l'opéra. (De Visme).                  |              |
|       | Le jugement de Midas. (Hales).                      |              |
|       | L'amant-jaloux. (Hales).                            |              |
| 1779. | Les évènements imprévus. (Hales).                   |              |
|       | Aucassin et Nicolette. (Sedaine).                   |              |
| 1780. | Andromaque. (Pitra).                                |              |

1781. Emilie. (Guillard).
1782. Colinette à la Cour. (Lourdé de Santerre).
1783. La Caravane du Caïre. (Morel de Chef-de-ville).
1784. L'épreuve Villageoise. (Desforges).  
Richard Cœur de Lion. (Sedaine).
1785. Panurge dans l'île des Lanternes. (Morel).
1786. Amphitryon. (Sedaine).  
Les Méprises par ressemblance. (Patrat).  
Le Comte d'Albert. (Sedaine).
1787. Le Prisonnier Anglais. (Desfontaines).
1788. Le Rival Confident. (Forgeot).
1789. Raoul Barbe-Bleue. (Sedaine).  
Aspasie. (Morel).
1790. Pierre le Grand. (Bouilly).
1791. Guillaume Tell. (Sedaine).
1792. Clarisse et Ermancé ou les deux Couvents. (Desprez).  
Basile ou à Trompeur, Trompeur et demi ("Diamond cut Diamond"). (Sedaine).
1794. La Rosière Republicaine (Planting of Tree of Liberty). (Sylvain Maréchal).  
Joseph Barra. (Lévrier)  
Denys le Tyran, maître d'école à Syracuse. } Unpublished.  
(Sylvain Maréchal)
- Callias ou Amour et Patrie. (Hoffmann).
1797. Lisbeth. (Favières).  
Anacréon chez Polycrate. (Guy).
1799. Elisca ou l'amour Maternel. (Favières).

1801. Le Casque et les Colombes. }  
      (Guillard).                        } Unpublished.  
1803. Delphis et Mopsa.                }

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CHAPTER V

ÉTIENNE NICOLAS MÉHUL

1763-1817



## CHAPTER V

ÉTIENNE NICOLAS MÉHUL

1763-1817

“ IF Méhul be not the greatest of our musicians, (and I do not know whom one could place above him), he is at least one of the greatest, certainly one of the most original and the one who best expresses the genius of France, the genius of clearness, vigour, concision, combined with elegance and style.”  
(A. POUGIN).

When the Revolution broke out in France Grétry was already middle-aged; Méhul was a young man still under thirty. Both were among the dozen musicians who collaborated perforce in such state ordered compositions as the “*Congrès des Rois*.” With more spontaneous inspiration Méhul wrote the famous *Chant du Départ*, which at that time rivalled the *Marseillaise* in popularity; in both cases it was the music rather than the words which inspired the crowds who sang them.

Now-a-days Méhul is chiefly known as the composer of *Joseph*; the fact that his other operas are practically unknown is due in many instances to the pooriness of their subjects; their fate may be taken

as an object lesson in the choice of a *libretto*. In the words of Cherubini, "It was not Méhul's talent which was at fault, but the subject of the poem. . . . In France the musician's fate always depends on the poet, and, whilst an excellent *libretto* may support mediocre music, the most beautiful music will never make a bad poem succeed."

Étienne Nicolas Méhul was born (22 June 1763) at Givet, a little town on the Meuse in the picturesque Ardennes district. As far as is known, his family was in no way remarkable nor could it boast of any particular musical talent. His father had been butler to Count Montmorency, afterwards, by a not unusual sequence of events, setting up a wine shop or tavern in Givet. Of four children only Étienne and a sister survived childhood. The plain, solid little house of the Méhuls is still standing in the rue Méhul (formerly rue des Religieuses) with a tablet commemorating the birth of the composer.

Evidently Méhul gave evidence of musical talent as a child, for at the age of ten he could play the organ in church, having been taught by the old blind organist of the place.

About this time a German monk named Hanser was appointed organist and musical director at the monastery of Laval-Dieu, some miles from Givet. This excellent musician started a class of eight pupils for organ and counterpoint at the monastery, and Méhul became a member of the class. For four or five years he lived at the monastery, "eating

at the Abbot's table," a favourite with his master and the monks, who received him at their own expense as he was too poor to pay. In any case he was a talented pupil, one of whom they could be justly proud, and his sojourn there is still commemorated by a tablet in the church, stating that "Méhul played on Hanser's organ." Laval-Dieu is a lovely spot sheltered by mountains, in a fertile valley rich in wild flowers. The monks were fond of gardening and perhaps under their influence the young musician learnt to love flowers, in later life an absorbing interest, almost a passion, with him. These were the happiest years of his life, so happy, in fact, that he earnestly desired to remain there all his life and take the vows. But circumstances, chiefly his poverty, were against this, and in 1779 he set out to seek his fortune in Paris. The Abbé and Hanser had procured him a post as organist and some pupils in Paris, further providing him with a letter of introduction to Gluck,<sup>1</sup> and thus at the age of seventeen young Méhul arrived in the capital, as so many penniless young artists have arrived.

In 1779 Gluck was busy rehearsing his *Iphigénie en Tauride*. Méhul had long worshipped his genius from afar and hastened to call upon him. Legends usually spring up around such interviews, and as regards this one it is recorded that the great man was at his harpsichord, playing very loudly

<sup>1</sup> Hanser had made the acquaintance of Gluck, Grétry and Couperin on a visit to Paris.

and gesticulating, in an extremely *négligé* costume (a black velvet cap, slippers and a "kind of camisole"), "but" (said the hero-worshipper from the Ardennes) "all the magnificence of Louis XIV's *toilette* could not have fascinated me as did Gluck's *négligé*." Fortunately the great man received the youth kindly, took him to his rehearsals of *Iphigénie* and gave him many valuable hints about music during the few months before his (Gluck's) departure from Paris. He influenced Méhul's development undoubtedly, "taught me the philosophy and poetry of music," (says Méhul), and especially advised him to leave church music for operatic composition. After attending the final rehearsal of *Iphigénie* (conducted by Gluck in person) Méhul was seized with a burning desire to be present at the performance on the following evening, but could not afford to pay for a seat. Only one solution of the difficulty presented itself. Hiding in a box on the top-most tier, he spent the night in the theatre, awaking next morning half dead with cold and hunger. Before noon Vestris arrived for a final rehearsal of the dances. There was great amusement when a forlorn, dusty, dishevelled figure emerged, confessing his inability to remain until evening without food. Vestris ordered chocolate for him and persuaded the authorities to grant a free pass to so ardent a devotee of opera. No letter, Méhul said, ever gave him such keen pleasure as the one which bestowed on him freedom of entry to the opera whenever he liked. A trivial story, but one

which shows, at any rate, a certain sympathy and respect for artists in those days.

Perhaps it was through Gluck that Méhul became a pupil of Edelmann, a noted harpsichord player and composer of sonatas and some operas.<sup>1</sup> Méhul wrote a few early works, three "sonates pour clavecin" and two operas, which have disappeared, before he was twenty-one.

Also he set to music the prize poem *Cora*, by Valadier (which had won the Government prize for the best libretto), but this opera was only produced six years later and then without success.

Soon, however, he was stimulated by a better librettist, François Hoffmann, a clever and original young author, afterwards an excellent critic and journalist. The two young men became friends and, with the first opera produced by their joint work, Méhul scored his first triumph.

*Euphrosine ou le Tyran corrigé* is the story of a despot who gradually yields to the charms of the beautiful Euphrosine. It was an immediate success. After its first performance (4th September 1790) Méhul found himself famous. The critics ranked him somewhere between Gluck and Grétry, "between the Corneille and Molière of music." Grétry himself wrote a generous appreciation of this young composer (just twenty-six years of age), comparing him flatteringly with Gluck at thirty.

<sup>1</sup> Edelmann, an ardent Republican, took up politics with more zeal than discretion, he and his brother were both condemned to death.

“ I do not say Gluck when he really was that age, but the experienced Gluck of sixty combined with the freshness of youth.”

Berlioz always considered the music of this work among Méhul's best in point of dramatic force and passion—especially the duet “ Beware of jealousy ” struck him as worthy of Shakespeare's Iago. (It was after this success that *Cora* made its appearance, only as a failure).

*Stratonice* (with Hoffmann's libretto) followed (3 May 1792), as great a success as *Euphrosine*. The heroine was a Greek princess, beloved by the King of Syria, but also by his son, whose love she returns. The king, discovering their mutual love, generously sacrifices his own passion and bestows Stratonice's hand on his son.

Then came some music for a ballet, *le Jugement de Paris*, in which Méhul put together music by Haydn and Pleyel with connecting links of his own (6 March 1793), followed three weeks later by a one-act piece (by Hoffmann) called *Le vieux Sage et le jeune Fou* (28 March 1793).

Méhul now began to write *Mélide et Phrosine* on a libretto by Arnault, but the poem, on being submitted to the Public Censors, was not considered sufficiently “ republican in spirit.” There was nothing to condemn in words or plot, but (said the censor, one citizen Baudrais), “ it is not enough that a work should not be *against* us, it must be *with* us. The spirit of your work is not republican : the manners of your characters are not republican :



the word 'liberty' does not occur once. You must bring your opera into harmony with our institutions." The word "liberty" was accordingly scattered generously about the poem, until the censors were appeased.

Meantime Méhul set to work on another subject, one more calculated to inspire patriotic sentiments. *Horatius Coclès* in one act (libretto by Arnault) was composed in seventeen days and performed 18th February 1794.<sup>1</sup> The heroic vein was in great favour at this moment and ancient history was ransacked to provide dramatic incidents for the inspiration and example of citizens: Cincinnatus, Marius, Mucius Scævola, the Gracchi, all provided object-lessons in patriotism and civic virtue. Republican leaders were fully alive to the importance of educating and permeating the people with ideas favourable to a republican régime, although their object-lessons were not always on such a high level of classical heroism as the above. They sometimes provided composers with degrading subjects, and it was only a week after *Horatius Coclès* that the performance of the infamous *Congrès des Rois* took place, for which twelve composers (including, as we have seen, Grétry and Méhul) had been commanded to write the music.

*Mélidore et Phrosine*, at last performed (4 May

<sup>1</sup> Méhul wrote two overtures for *Horatius*, one of which he used afterwards for his opera *Adrien*, which shows the overture as a detached or detachable prelude rather than closely connected with the work.

1794), scored a success in spite of its unattractive plot, which turned upon the guilty love of a brother for his sister. It was really the music which made the success of this opera: Méhul's genius showed itself strong enough to triumph over a weak libretto. He was again compared to Gluck, "since the *finale* to Act I of Gluck's *Armide* nothing so forcible has been written as the *finale* to Act I of *Phrosine*."

This opera appeared five or six weeks before the fall of Robespierre, whose death preserved so many lives more precious than his own. At this moment, when the frenzy of accusation was at its height and even the most innocent were "suspect," the very success of *Mélide* was dangerous. Arnault relates that, as nothing incriminating could be found in either words or music, both author and composer were denounced for "unseemly extravagance in the costumes," a detail for which they were in no way responsible and for which only the singers were to blame. Méhul went to Barrère, a member of the Committee of Public Safety, whom he knew personally, and asked his advice. Barrère advised them to take no steps in the matter, but to let the opera run its course. To withdraw it might look like admitting the charge against them. As far as risks were concerned, was not every one in danger who in any way attracted attention? "Besides," said Barrère calmly, "are we not all at the foot of the guillotine, all of us, beginning with myself?" This he added with an air of complete detachment.

Méhul confessed afterwards to a secret shudder,

for Barrère had received them in his dressing-gown, bare-necked, a costume not without suggestion of a dread possibility. The librettist Arnault, who was present at the interview, had already been arrested as an "émigré" two years before and owed his life to the actress, Mlle. Comtat, to whom he now dedicated the poem of *Mélide et Phrosine*.

No one, in fact, was safe at that time, but Méhul remained unmolested in spite of the menace. Other musicians, too, had their vicissitudes: Sarette, the founder and director of the Institut National de Musique was sent to prison because one of his pupils had sung Grétry's detested air, "Richard, O mon roi." He was allowed to come out in order to superintend arrangements for the Fête of the Supreme Being, accompanied, however, by a gendarme who never left him by day or night. After a time this extreme vigilance relaxed and Sarette was finally released. Ignatius Pleyel was arrested for no particular reason at Strasbourg and ordered to write a patriotic Song with grand orchestra as a proof of his republican sentiments.

A characteristic incident is related by Pougin. A class of pupils from the Conservatoire, accompanied by their professor, set out (on 19 Fructidor, An IV.) to visit the "Molière of music" (Grétry) in his Ermitage at Montmorency. On reaching St. Denis their "papers" were examined in the Municipal Hall and considered unsatisfactory. The professor was detained as hostage until the

youths proved their status as musicians by improvising a canon in five parts :

Citoyens, rendez-nous notre professeur,  
C'est un bon—citoyen,

after which they were allowed to pursue their pilgrimage. Such incidents were of daily occurrence under the paternal rule of the Republic. But musicians as a class were held in due honour by the Convention. They were always applauded at public *fêtes*, where they occupied seats of honour and their names were published by the side of victorious generals, for it was recognised that their music was a work of "public utility."

In July of this same year the famous *Chant du Départ*, which soon rivalled the *Marseillaise*, was sung in public for the first time. There are several stories about its composition. The poem was by Marie Joseph Chénier, whose brother, the unfortunate André, was under sentence of death at the time. One version has it that Chénier showed the poem to Méhul at an evening reception and Méhul then and there jotted down the music, undisturbed by the talk and laughter going on about him. However this may have been, *le Chant du Départ* was sung at the various *fêtes* which the Government ordered so frequently: at the commemoration of the fall of the Bastille (14th July), again on 24th September, when the body of Marat was placed in the Panthéon (that of Mirabeau having been removed to make room for him), again

at the distribution of flags to the soldiers, in short, at all public ceremonies. Some 18,000 copies were distributed to soldiers and the song became a national possession. In a Proclamation a couple of years later it was stated: "In the first rank of Republican composers the nation places and proclaims Citizen Méhul, whose *Chant du Départ* rivals the *Hymne des Marseillaise*."

Other patriotic songs of this kind written by Méhul during this period were: The Hymn of the 9th Thermidor, the Song of Victories, the Song of the Return (*Chant du Retour*), all to words by M. J. Chénier, and other Hymns—to Reason, to the Eternal, to Peace, to the Supreme Being—all composed for public festivals.

Although Grétry declared that no great musical works were inspired during the Revolution, it was not the fault of those in authority, for they were really anxious to encourage the Arts, especially music. Chénier doubtless voiced their ideas when he proposed the institution of a Conservatoire de Musique: "It will be a glorious thing for you, Representatives, to show an astonished Europe how, in the midst of a great war, which has been an uninterrupted series of triumphs for the Republic . . . whilst establishing a wise and republican constitution which shall endure for centuries, how in the midst of all this you have devoted some moments to the encouragement of an art which has gained victories and which shall yet celebrate

the delights of peace." Even in the Reign of Terror the Convention respected music, recognising the power of a song like the *Marseillaise* to inspire armies. One of the first acts of the Revolutionary authorities, as far back as 1789, had been to grant theatres the right to manage their own affairs, and an immediate consequence of this was the dismissal of a troupe of Italian artistes under the management of Marie Antoinette's hair-dresser, whose place at the théâtre Feydeau was taken by French actors; these were soon in keen rivalry with the Opéra Comique. Singers and actors no doubt regretted the lost magnificence of court performances, where scenery, costumes, orchestra were on a lavish scale. Under the old régime, too, a generous if arbitrary system of pensions and royal gifts had rewarded genius. Old artists especially felt the loss of this support, but the younger ones, like Méhul, greeted the new order of things with enthusiasm, until they were horrified by its excesses. The little band of musicians seem to have drawn closely together during this period, especially during the Reign of Terror, forming a circle of friends united by common interests and a common danger: Grétry, Cherubini, Gossec, Berton, Méhul, Lesueur, Boieldieu, the youngest of all. They were obliged to take part in the numerous patriotic fêtes and to collaborate in musical productions for those occasions.

When the Hymn to the Supreme Being (by Gossec) was to be performed, Robespierre con-

ceived the brilliant idea of having it sung by the whole population of Paris at the Champ de Mars. Méhul, Gossec and Lesueur, who were professors at the Institut de Musique (near the Rue Montmartre) were ordered to rehearse the crowds beforehand. Every evening the three composers taught as many as they could gather together to sing the air in unison. Whether this took place in the Institut or whether, as the legend has it, the three sallied forth to the Boulevards, the Halles and the neighbourhood of the Institut respectively, is not certain, but upon one occasion Gossec was carried shoulder-high by enthusiastic *Citoyens*. Towards the close of 1795 the Government showed their appreciation of Méhul by making him one of the Directors at the Conservatoire de Musique,<sup>1</sup> also appointing him to represent music at the Institut. In these posts he was associated with Grétry, Gossec, Lesueur, Cherubini, altogether a flattering distinction for a young musician (he was barely thirty-two).

It was a pity that two operas composed at this time should have failed owing to their weak *libretti*. *Doria ou la Tyrannie détruite* (Legouvé and d'Avrigny) was performed in March, 1795, without success. And *La Caverne* (Forgeot), in the same year, was equally unfortunate. (The plot of the latter had already been used by Lesueur in an opera

<sup>1</sup> After 3rd August, 1795, the Institut National de Musique became the Conservatoire; the Directors received 5,000 livres per annum.



of the same name).<sup>1</sup> Only a small portion of Méhul's *Caverne* has been preserved.

Méhul was persistently unfortunate in his *libretti*; strangely enough, he never seemed to realise that a good plot and a well-written poem are factors of importance in operatic success. Critics respected his music; quite early in his career his reputation as a composer was assured. Again and again his operas were apparently successful at their first performance; there was applause from an interested audience, criticisms of the music were favourable. But the interest was short-lived, audiences grew smaller after the first night or two and soon the opera would be withdrawn. The music, however much appreciated, could not compensate bored audiences for vapid subjects. Thus the apparent success would resolve itself into a failure, especially on the financial side. Méhul felt these disappointments very keenly, but does not seem to have understood the real reason. In later life, when he was melancholy and easily depressed as a consequence of ill-health, he fancied that the world was against him and spoke bitterly of the intrigues of enemies.

With curious lack of insight and rare humility he attributed the blame of one of these failures to himself. This was in connection with a later work, *Les Amazones ou la Fondation de Thèbes* (1811),

<sup>1</sup> It was quite customary for two or more composers to write music on the same subject. Thus there were two Operas "Lodoïska," two "Paul and Virginia," two "Romeo and Juliet," etc.



composed on an unusually stupid "book" by one Jouy, a naval officer, who had turned his attention to literature. This work was an irremediable *fiasco*, heightened by an untoward accident to stage machinery. The car descended without the God, Jupiter casually making his entrance on foot *after* the supreme moment, to the untoward joy of spectators, among whom were the Emperor and Empress. Méhul was bitterly disappointed. But either he did not realise the weakness of the *libretto* or he was too generous to reproach Jouy with it. He wrote in the depths of discouragement: "We fall, my dear Jouy, and I feel it deeply. My star dims yours, I have brought you ill-luck. Do not be angry with me, I have done my best, I can do no more. You have been more successful with others and will be so again." Speaking of another *libretto* of Jouy's he continues: "I have not the courage to write the music. I am bruised, crushed, disgusted, discouraged! One needs happiness, mine is finished. I must and will keep to peaceful interests. I will live among my flowers, in my silent retreat, far from the world and its intrigues. I cannot give up the art I love and the work I need, but my happiness shall no longer be dependent on the superficial but harsh criticisms of a capricious public."

Yet two years later (1813) he could not resist composing another opera, *le Prince Troubadour ou le Coureur des Dames*. Once again his music suffered through the ineptness of the poem (by Alexandre

Duval). Again Méhul suspected intrigues on the part of enemies. This attitude explains the bitterness so apparent in his *éloge funèbre* of Grétry, four years later, when, after alluding to Grétry's easily-won success, he added: "If one knew beforehand at what price fame is bought, proud and sensitive souls would choose a life of obscurity in preference to the *éclat* which is too much envied not to be a source of sorrows."

We have slightly anticipated the course of events in order to show how Méhul all his life was the victim of poor *libretti*; his work, his career and his fame suffered in consequence. Perhaps he was lacking in poetic and dramatic instinct and merely looked upon the text as a peg whereon to hang music. In any case he was careless in this respect and accepted almost any "book" without criticism. (His most successful work, *Joseph*, is again a case in point).

He shewed an equally unfortunate lack of insight in his choice of a wife, the daughter of a fashionable doctor named Gastaldy, who frequented the artistic *salons* of the day, in private life a somewhat notorious character, a gambler and a drunkard. The daughter inherited some of her father's intellectual gifts, but unfortunately most of his eccentricities (among them a violent temper). After eighteen months of married life the couple agreed to separate. Mme. Méhul retired to Lyons and henceforth never took the slightest interest in her husband or his affairs, ex-

cepting that on his death she made a sudden visit to Paris in order to take possession of all his portable property, including the score of musical works, etc., which she carried off to Lyons. She outlived Méhul by 40 years.

Another librettist now dawned upon Méhul's horizon, unfortunately as inept as his predecessors. He proffered the weak poem of *Le jeune Henri*, which Méhul accepted. Grétry had wisely declined this subject some years before but Méhul, with his usual lack of discrimination, wasted some of his best music upon a libretto so evidently ill-timed.

Bouilly we may recall as the young friend and occasional librettist of Grétry (whose youngest daughter had been betrothed to him). He was not greatly admired by critics of the period, who considered his style too lachrymose—he clung to the phase of Sensibility—and were fond of introducing the obvious pun upon his name.

*Le jeune Henri* savoured of royalty and the public, at once recognising a "tyran" in the title rôle, hissed and made such loud demonstration of displeasure at the first performance (1st May 1797), that it was impossible to proceed. The music however, was recognised as beautiful. At the third performance the public insisted on Méhul appearing on the stage in spite of his reluctance, and public, actors, orchestra all greeted him with applause. The overture was so especially brilliant that even on the first evening it was enthusiastically encored and became so phenomenally popular that

it was afterwards regularly performed as a kind of Interlude at operatic performances during a period of nearly 30 years.

This Overture, known as *La Chasse du Jeune Henri*, is one of Méhul's most celebrated works, and still survives as an interesting example of Programme Music. It is frankly descriptive, following a Stag Hunt under the headings: Dawn, the call to the Hunt, the trail found, lost, found again, the gallop, the killing of the stag, etc. Méhul obtained an effect by placing the horns at various points in the orchestra to answer each other, a device greatly admired. This brilliant piece of descriptive music is always associated with Méhul, whilst the opera itself (in two acts) was a lamentable failure. The idea of "royalty" was sufficient to damn the plot, although the connection with Henry IV. was of the slightest. But the story, a mere episode, was in itself too feeble and insipid to ensure any better result. The young prince in disguise who carries off the prize in village sports offered no great dramatic interest.

A new era dawned in Paris when the nightmare Reign of Terror at last came to an end. The old order had been swept away and there were new fashions in everything, in dress, in social life, in art, new *salons* with new shibboleths.

Méhul was welcome everywhere, not only as a musician of genius but as a delightful companion with intellectual interests and great personal charm. Warm-hearted and affectionate, capable of any

sacrifice for those he loved, he had a large circle of devoted friends, who in some measure compensated him for the lack of domestic happiness.

There were all kinds of artistic and literary *salons* at which Méhul appeared as the fashionable young composer. At Madame Recamier's, for instance, in the Chaussée d'Antin or in the summer at Clichy; at the banker Séguin's; at Talma's suppers, the *rendez-vous* more especially of actors and literary men. Every one of note was also to be met at the house of the painter Ducreux (who painted the best known portrait of Méhul as a young man of thirty),<sup>1</sup> whose charming wife and pretty daughters were the attraction of their *salon*. Among the *habitués* were La Harpe, Fontanes, Piccinni, Sophie Arnault, Pradher, Cherubini, travellers and foreigners of note. Here Méhul made the acquaintance of Joséphine Beauharnais, who took a great fancy to him and presented him in due course to the First Consul Bonaparte. Méhul was always a favourite with them both. Perhaps he was most thoroughly at home in the house of the famous violinist Kreutzer (to whom Beethoven dedicated the sonata bearing his name, which it is said Kreutzer never played). Madame Kreutzer was an especially delightful hostess and there was an atmosphere of unaffected kindness and ease at their receptions which Méhul enjoyed. His affection for these friends is very evident in his letters

<sup>1</sup> A pastel, Méhul in the Directoire period, with long hair, close-shaven, a huge white cravat and coat à la Robespierre.

to Madame Kreutzer. Everywhere "ce cher Méhul" was welcome. He talked well, with flashes of wit and repartee, and, when in the mood, had a knack of improvising stories of the supernatural with telling effect. He showed real literary skill in working up to a climax which thrilled his hearers. With this dramatic instinct it is strange that he was so uncritical about his *libretti*.

In person Méhul was about middle height, slightly built, with rather irregular features, a delightful smile and a beautiful speaking voice. ("When he simply said 'Good morning,' the word had a charm," said the painter Prud'hon). Among his personal friends were the thirty years older Gossec, who was especially fond of him; Boieldieu, the much younger composer, adored him (Méhul proved himself a generous friend at Boieldieu's début in the musical world); Cherubini, his colleague at the Conservatoire. Rouget de Lisle (the young officer who wrote both words and music of the *Marseillaise*) and Méhul were warmly attached to each other. Rouget de Lisle dedicated his *essais en vers et en prose* to his friend (1796), "to the noble and sensitive soul who upholds the dignity of the true artist." No artist was ever more universally loved and respected than Méhul. There was a nobility and manly straightforwardness in his character which even his enemies were forced to admire, and his generosity was extraordinary. In the words of Arnault, "whilst other people may have generous *traits*, Méhul's whole

life was generosity." His help of Boieldieu, the procuring of a Government pension for Monsigny,<sup>1</sup> reduced to poverty in his old age, are but isolated instances.

As a young man Méhul was ambitious, he longed for fame—"j'aime la gloire avec fureur," he wrote in his thirtieth year. He achieved fame, but the failure of his operas to establish themselves as lasting successes was a bitter disappointment. He imagined himself the victim of intrigues and enemies, especially in later life, and even his generous nature sometimes gave way to jealousy when he saw others succeed where he had failed. He confessed with childlike frankness: "I don't think I am envious, yet other people's successes give me pain. I hope to expiate my fault by confessing it."

The vicissitudes of the opera *Adrien* show the determination of the Republic to root out any lingering admiration of royalty. As early as 1792 Méhul had composed the music of *Adrien, Empereur de Rome* on a libretto by Hoffman, founded on Metastasio's "Hadrian in Syria." The choice of such a subject at that time seems inexplicable. No sooner were rehearsals in progress than the authors were accused of anti-republican sentiments and finally the production was forbidden on the

<sup>1</sup> Composer of opera (*Félix* and *le Déserteur*), was ruined by the Revolution, and at the age of 77, when Méhul helped him, was almost blind as well as without means of support. Audibert (*Indiscrétions et Confidences*) gives a charming account of Méhul's kind reception of a young unknown artist.



ground that it might occasion "des troubles." In vain Hoffmann protested energetically in newspapers and open letters that the work was not the least in favour of royalty.

For seven years it remained unheard, but at last (5 March 1799) it was permitted to appear as *Adrien*, the objectionable "*Emperor*" having been banished from the title.

It was an immediate success with the public, the "poem" being praised and the music pronounced a *chef d'œuvre*, "rich, beautiful, worthy of the author of *Stratonice*." But the Five Hundred, alarmed lest the pomp and circumstance attendant on Emperors should exercise a deleterious effect upon the public mind, declared it a "seditious" work and intrigues were set on foot which stopped the performances.

Next year, however, when Napoleon became First Consul, *Adrien* was revived (3 February 1800) before a crowded house. Again critics sang its praises. Yet *Adrien* was not really a success, in spite of the music. Méhul spoke of this "unfortunate" work; it remained one of those tantalising half-successes which disappointed him so often. Including revivals in 1801 and 1803, *Adrien* was performed nineteen times in all. It was never published, but the original score exists in the archives of the Opéra.<sup>1</sup>

(It is curious how many composers were attracted by the subject of Hadrian. No fewer than

<sup>1</sup> Méhul's preceding operas were also never published.



thirty-three operas were written with this title, among the composers being Pergolesi, Scarlatti, J. C. Bach).

In the same year *Ariodant* was staged (11 October 1799). The subject of this opera in three acts was taken by Hoffmann from "Orlando Furioso," in the hope, said Méhul, that heroes of ancient chivalry might prove less obnoxious than those of royal or imperial lineage. The plot was similar to that of Shakespêare's "Much Ado about Nothing." Some of his finest music is in this opera, which Berlioz ranks as among those "very beautiful works of Méhul which scored no great success."<sup>1</sup> Cherubini said it was full of musical beauties. The overture had original effects, it was simply an introduction (*adagio*) for 'cellos and double-bass, ending on the dominant and immediately followed by an air for tenor. Whether Rossini knew this overture or not, (and probably he did, says Mr. Pougin), some of the effects obtained in his overture of "Tell" were anticipated by Méhul.

M. Brancour considers the musical painting in the Invocation to Night as worthy of comparison with passages in *Freischütz* and Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. "To the murmur of the strings the fanfare of distant horns is borne, flute and violin answer, soon joined by clarinet and bassoon. Then a double choir sings the mys-

<sup>1</sup> *Ariodant* was not without success, however. It was performed thirty-eight times, then revived in the following year with a quite brilliant reception. Critics were enthusiastic.

terious strains of the hymn of love. The music of *Ariodant* is dramatic, sombre, passionate, imbued with the spirit of romantic chivalry in keeping with the subject."

In July 1800 the grand national Fête de la Concorde commemorated the taking of the Bastille and the return of the victorious army from Italy with Bonaparte, First Consul, at its head. Méhul was commissioned to write music for this event upon a poem by Fontanes, "le Chant du 25 Messidor" (10 June). The work was on a grandiose scale, as befitted the occasion.

Méhul introduced three orchestras (considered enormous in those days), two of a hundred performers each, the third, consisting only of two harps and a horn, accompanied a female choir. These orchestras were placed at a distance from each other, two in the nave of the Temple of Mars (les Invalides), the small one in the dome. Playing sometimes alternately, sometimes massed, they produced a great effect, contrasted with the effect of lightness produced by the voices, harp and horns in the dome.

The *Chant* was in six parts: the first with two large orchestras and three choirs (*adagio*); then one orchestra and bass solo (*allegro*), etc. Another innovation was the use of the tuba, buccina<sup>1</sup> and tamtam in orchestra (this last also used with effect in *Uthal*). The music has not been preserved, al-

<sup>1</sup> Ancient Roman instruments, apparently copied from Roman sculpture.

though it made profound impression at the time. Méhul conducted in person before the brilliant assembly, which was no longer quite republican in its arrangements. The First Consul, the other Consuls, the municipal authorities, the Diplomatic *Corps* all occupied seats of honour, surrounded by persons of rank and fashion, and citizens were not admitted *en masse* but by invitation.

Méhul was very successful in these compositions for choir and orchestra on a vast scale. Originating in the popular *fêtes* of the Republic, they were continued under the Empire and Méhul was the most frequent composer. He wrote the *Cantata* (as they began to be called) in honour of the marriage of Napoleon and Marie Louise (1810).

*La Dansomanie*, "folie pantomime" (a ballet in two acts), shows Méhul in different vein. The idea and the plot came from Gardel, a dancer, and had the advantage of being mimed or danced by a galaxy of "stars," among them Vestris and Gardel. The part of the "dance maniac" was taken by a famous dancer named Goyon (June, 1800).

This lively, almost farcical, piece was one of the most successful ballets ever produced, and remained on the répertoire twenty-six years.

In the spring of this same year Givet, Méhul's birthplace, recognised its illustrious citizen by a fête in his honour. The theatre was decorated with flowers and inscriptions; there were speeches, song, a ballet. In the absence of Méhul himself his "venerable parents" were honoured in his name,

occupying seats of honour, presented with bouquets by the singers, whilst a bust of the composer was wreathed with flowers and a tablet placed in the theatre as a permanent record :

“ Méhul, born at Givet, 22 June 1763, was crowned here, 25 Floréal An VIII (15 May 1800). ”<sup>1</sup>

This recalls the similar homage rendered to Grétry by the town of Liège, at which his mother had occupied the post of honour. On the whole a more gracious appreciation than the posthumous honours of funeral processions.

Unfortunately Méhul's works, in various styles, about this time were unimportant, uninteresting as regards *libretti*, and unsuccessful. *Une Folie* (April 1802) on a stupid “ book ” by Bouilly was only saved from being a complete *fiasco* by the music.

A change of style came under the influence of “ Ossian,” which swept over Europe about this time, a complete contrast to the stilted classicism of monarchical days, the domestic sentimentalism of Grétry and the half-hearted leaning toward Greek and Roman subjects under the Directoire. “ Ossian ” roused enthusiasm throughout Europe. The poems were read, translated, imitated. Lesueur composed an opera which became very popular (*Ossian ou les Bardes*, 1804). Napoleon declared that he loved Ossian “ like the murmur of winds and waves of the sea. ”<sup>2</sup> Méhul found inspiration

<sup>1</sup> A statue of Méhul was unveiled at Givet in 1892 by Massenet.

<sup>2</sup> He was still fond of reading “ Ossian ” at St. Helena.

in a poem by one Saint Victor and composed *Uthal*, a one-act opera (17 May 1806). The plot is founded upon the episode of Malvina, wife of Uthal, the hero who is fighting against her father. Malvina says she will belong to the vanquished, the one who is most unhappy and who needs her most. The dramatic interest was not very strong and once again Méhul's music suffered in consequence. He had succeeded in reflecting something of the melancholy grandeur of the poem, and in the overture imparted a sombre character to the music by employing violas instead of violins, an original effect (which Grétry, however, found extremely depressing). As usual he obtained some excellent contrasts, *e.g.*, the Hymn to the Sun sung by "Bards" to harp, flute and horns, and the virile war songs.

*Uthal* was a failure, so was *Gabrielle d'Estreés* (only three months later), and friendly critics advised Méhul not to waste his music on inept poems, nor "to accustom our young authors to count on the genius of an Orpheus to make their stupidities succeed."

Napoleon (or, as he was known at the earlier part of his career, Bonaparte) had a great liking for Méhul, not entirely for his musical genius, which he did not altogether appreciate, but because he was personally sympathetic. Méhul always dined once a week at Malmaison and the First Consul was fond of discussing music with him, as with other artists. He frankly thought the Con-

servatoire and Méhul's own compositions too "tudesque" and "scientifique." His idea was that music should be pleasing to the ear, the present school was too noisy. He preferred the Italian School of light opera (Paisiello), etc.

Méhul, by way of reply, showed surprising versatility by composing (*incognito*) the music of *l'Irato*, a light "opera bouffe" completely different from his usual style. Marsollier had written the amusing *libretto*, but Méhul did not acknowledge his share in the work at first. It was announced as an Italian opera with French words, music by "Signor Fiorelli," and was performed during Carnival (17th February 1801). The result was an extraordinary success and a great triumph for Méhul when he disclosed his identity with "Signor Fiorelli."

Bonaparte was delighted with the hoax and begged Méhul to "deceive him often in this way," a doubtful compliment. Méhul dedicated *l'Irato* to him when it was published.

"To General Bonaparte,

"First Consul of the French Republic.

"Your remarks about music having inspired me with the desire to compose something in less severe style than that which I have hitherto employed, I have ventured upon *l'Irato*: the attempt has succeeded, to you I owe it.

"Salut et respect,

"MÉHUL."

After the dedication comes a declaration of Méhul's musical faith, a reply to criticisms on this new departure.

He begins by saying that after *l'Irato* many persons may imagine he has changed his style, and if *l'Irato* pleases them they will quote it to condemn his previous works. But he is not converted to any other style. "In music I know of no one style hostile to another. . . . I think music has a nobler aim than that of merely pleasing the ear, it is not bound to be always 'amiable.' The style of music must always be determined by the drama, as the choice of colours is determined by the picture to be painted. If the music of *l'Irato* is different from my previous work, it is because *l'Irato* is different from any of my previous subjects. I know that most people like merely pretty music, but truth should never be sacrificed to charm."

*Joseph*, Méhul's crowning work, the one with which his name is chiefly associated, owed its existence to something like a challenge, lightly given and taken; another proof of his carelessness as regards subjects. During a dinner at Madame Gay's (another brilliant rendezvous for artists and authors), the talk turned on the tragedy *Omasis* or *Joseph in Egypt* by Baour-Lormian, recently performed at the Comédie Française. There was a lively discussion about the suitability of the story for dramatic purposes. The tragedy in question had introduced a not very successful love episode. Alexandre Duval maintained that the Biblical story



should be given in its simplicity. Méhul suggested it as a theme for opera and said he would compose the music if Duval wrote the poem. Duval afterwards had misgivings and found it a difficult task to provide sufficient dramatic interest. He could only make the most of Simeon's cruelty and Jacob's blindness by way of relief to the simplicity of the plot. With these meagre resources he produced the poem in a fortnight and Méhul wrote the music in two months. Thus was conceived and written the three-act opera *Joseph*, Méhul's greatest work (performed 17th February 1807). It was received with enthusiasm in spite of the weakness of the libretto, but only obtained 13 performances in Paris. In the provinces it was more popular and subsequent revivals were successful. Respect for the work steadily grew and musicians in all countries, especially in Germany, appreciated the quality of the music, both then and later.

Weber, who produced *Joseph* at Dresden (1817), pronounced it "a musical fresco, rather drab in tone but imbued with a sentiment, a pathos, a purity of line and composition beyond compare." It ought, says M. de Curzon, to be considered a scenic oratorio rather than opera; "fresco" characterises it most happily.

Berlioz admired the music greatly—"The music is nearly always simple, touching, rich in successful if not very bold modulations, in broad full harmonies, in graceful accompaniment; the expression is always truthful." He mentions the prayer,



"God of Israel," in which the voices, only supported by detached chords (brass) are extremely effective. In its restraint it may lack colour, energy, movement, but it is not meant to be full of passionate life; it is, in short, a fresco. Wagner was enthusiastic and made musical friends study with him—"Méhul's magnificent work, which transported me to a higher world." *Joseph* was in fact greatly appreciated from the first in Germany and Austria. Cherubini praised it warmly as a work in which Méhul put forth all his resources, all his genius, but said this successful work would be his swan-song, and in this Cherubini was right. The opinion of a modern musician like M. Alfred Bruneau is equally enthusiastic: "One of the most real, most magnificent *chefs d'œuvre* of French art." He speaks of the purity, nobility, grandeur and strength of this music, which is virile yet tender, austere yet human, clearly defined as an antique marble. "In this sublime *Joseph*, his *chef d'œuvre*, Méhul has expressed himself, his tender, sensitive self, his kind, sad heart."

*Joseph* was indeed Méhul's swan-song. Subsequent works (among them *Les Amazones* already noticed) were neither important nor successful.<sup>1</sup> He had always been delicate in health and consumption now definitely declared itself. He grew

<sup>1</sup> *L'Oriflamme*, a little one-act opera, "inspired" to revive enthusiasm in Napoleon's star, was written in collaboration (Méhul, Paër, Kreutzer, Berton), composed, rehearsed and produced in six days. It was received enthusiastically (1 Feb., 1814), but only achieved 11 performances.

reserved, taciturn, and felt more and more keenly any failure or adverse criticism of his works. Naturally there were envious rivals and the usual detractors of fame and genius, but, whereas Méhul had once laughed at their attacks, he now suffered deeply and began to fancy enemies everywhere.

A great consolation in his last years was his love of flowers. He bought the poet's idéal, a small country house with a large garden, at Pantin and found happiness in his hobby, which became almost a passion. His love of flowers (in which he resembled Maupassant) was extraordinary. He was especially fond of tulips, collecting the rarest and most beautiful kinds ("their variety fascinates me," he said). Méhul never did anything by halves; he flung himself into this new pursuit with his usual energy, became friends with noted horticulturists and was soon known as a successful *amateur*: roses, pinks, hyacinths he loved, too, and he had a special fondness for auriculas. "A bed of choice anemones, arranged artistically, are to the eye what the music of Mozart and Gluck is to the ear." He discovered that florists were nearly always good folk, whom one must love, they are nearer Nature, farther from mankind and perhaps happier. "The flower lover has more durable, if less ardent, happiness than the lover of women. The object of his devotion does not appeal to his soul, but neither does it torment him. Jealousy and inconstancy, the cause of so much trouble in love affairs, are unknown in 'floro-

mania.' " Thus Méhul wrote, half in earnest, as he realised the wish he had expressed after the humiliating failure of *Les Amazones*: " I want to live among my flowers in retirement and silence, far from the world." Thus the Méhul of fifty returned to the peaceful life of his boyhood at Laval-Dieu, where the monks had given him a little plot of ground and taught him gardening. The days when he wrote " I love fame with passion " had come and gone meantime.

Inspired by Haydn's Symphonies, some of which were performed in Paris about this time, Méhul turned his attention to this form of composition. Between 1808-1810 four of his symphonies were performed, all with the exception of the first being composed about this date.<sup>1</sup> They were received with enthusiasm. He wished, he said, to show that a Frenchman can follow Mozart and Haydn, though afar off. Critics considered him of Haydn's school, though not an imitator of it. At that time Haydn was judged to have attained " the highest degree of perfection." Mozart in the opinion of many eminent critics, followed him at a great distance. Beethoven had gone " beyond his own aims in allowing his genius to wander in the intricate complications of science " <sup>2</sup> . . . . But some even considered Haydn obscure and unintelligible.

Méhul's views were far in advance of these.

<sup>1</sup> The first had been composed 1797, but there is no record of its performance at that time.

<sup>2</sup> *Le Moniteur Universel*, 17th March 1809.

When Duval asked him in some surprise, "Do you really consider Mozart incomparable?" he answered simply, "I really don't know. I never even thought of comparing him with anyone."<sup>1</sup>

Early criticisms of Beethoven are usually both amusing and instructive. French critics considered "the astonishing success of Beethoven's compositions a dangerous example for musical art. The contagion of 'tudesque' harmony seems to gain on the modern school of composition at the Conservatoire. They imagine they can produce an effect by the most barbarous dissonances and by employing all the instruments with *fracas*. Alas! it only tortures the ear, but never speaks to the heart."<sup>2</sup>

The downfall of Napoleon and the reverses of France were painful blows to Méhul. In addition he was personally affected by the new government's treatment of the Conservatoire. The founder and director, Sarette, was summarily dismissed, the revenues of the Conservatoire were greatly diminished and its very name was changed to that of simple "College of music." The salaries of professors were reduced. Cherubini and Méhul were among those who suffered, being deprived of their titles of "Inspecteurs" and reduced to "professors

1 Méhul's orchestra in these symphonies consisted of strings, two flutes, three oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, and kettledrums, no trumpets or trombones. Only two are known to-day, "they are intelligent but not great essays at this style of composition" (Pougin).

2 *Tablettes de Polymnie*, March, 1810.

of composition." Méhul, who had devoted himself to the Conservatoire for over twenty years, suffered intensely at this and other slights to art under the new *régime*.

During the next few years Méhul was slowly dying. In January, 1817, the doctors sent him to the South of France. His letters are echoes of the weary journey—in those days of travelling!—of an invalid, alone and so weak that on reaching Hyères, after one or two halting places on the way, he could only find rest in bed. To Madame Kreutzer he wrote, "At Lyons, as at Paris, I am a phantom who frightens children, but whom, fortunately, the grown-ups love. . . . My heart is the only part of me that lives, I have only sufficient strength to tell you that I love you, living or dying." Hyères with its cold winds was not a suitable place, "alone, at the ends of the earth, in an inn," among strangers whose language he could scarcely understand, he suffered intensely. There was no one to nurse him, and although the inn folk were not unkind, "the invalid is somewhat neglected when other travellers arrive." Utterly worn out, even music ceased to interest him: "I don't believe I can even remember how many notes there are in a scale."

Recovering somewhat towards the spring, he wrote from Hyères in March again to Madame Kreutzer, (we see him as, in spirit, one of Stevenson's little company of friends awaiting the summons to the last voyage):

“ Let us try to keep well, to meet again, to care for each other still more, until we arrive gently at the end of a life which we must give back, as it was only lent to us.”

On his way home he was received at Marseilles with every demonstration of honour : receptions, a concert, performances of *Joseph* and others of his works. May found him once more at Pantin, unfortunately no better for his sojourn in the South. He lingered through the summer among his flowers, but early in autumn returned to his house in Paris (rue Montholon, now 28), reduced to “ sitting by the fire and coughing from morning until night, and often from night until morning.” Here—18 October 1817,—he died.

Cherubini pronounced his *éloge* or funeral oration, and in course of time was laid to rest near his friend in the musicians’ corner of Père la Chaise. Others of the group of friends are here : Grétry, Lesueur, Boieldieu, Hérold, also Bellini and Chopin.

In an uncommon degree Méhul was beloved and respected ; his death was felt as a great loss by friends in many different circles ; all bear witness to his uprightness and sincerity, to a real nobility of nature. His generosity was almost quixotic.

Although he had left home so early and in spite of the distance (geographical and mental) between them, he was always attached to his own family. He felt his father’s death keenly (as late as 1807), and adopted the son of his sister (Madame

Daussoigne), bringing the child of six to Paris and providing for him generously. This nephew had some musical talent and was Méhul's pupil. An old aunt, a sister of his mother, also found a home with him in Paris.

He was chivalrous in defence of his friends. When critics accused Cherubini of imitating his music, Méhul wrote an indignant letter to the Press, declaring that a composer like Cherubini had no need to imitate any one, for he had his own inimitable style. And he offended Napoleon by refusing to accept a post of *Maître de Chapelle* unless Cherubini (who, he thought, deserved it) could share it with him. The post in question was given to Lesueur. He usually took no notice of attacks upon himself, but there is a characteristic anecdote of how he once challenged the author of some especially insulting remarks to a duel. When they met, Méhul's hand trembled, but, said he, "Make no mistake; it is from anger, not from fear," and he had the satisfaction of wounding his adversary. In reality he felt such attacks keenly, especially in later life, when weakened and depressed by ill-health.

The singers and executants of Méhul's works were devoted to him, and so were his pupils, who praise his manner of teaching as unusually clear, lucid, concise, "light itself." Hérold, the most distinguished of these, was especially fond of him and proud of being his pupil. "Shall I ever be worthy of such a master?"

Méhul, like Gossec, became an official musician



of the Revolution, developing an aptitude for composing music to suit the numerous fêtes arranged by the Republic: the *hymnes*, *chants*, compositions for voices and orchestra on a large scale, and cantatas. These fêtes were held in the open air or in large public buildings and necessitated masses of sound. Some critics thought that Méhul's style was rather spoilt by this, as he grew accustomed to providing loud, noisy effects. As the idea of the fêtes was to inspire citizens with republican and patriotic ardour, the audiences were encouraged to take part in the singing. Méhul dreamed of choirs of 3,000 voices, considered "monstrous" in those days. Little of this music is preserved, but from contemporary criticism it seems to have been often "academic" and uninspired, its effect being due chiefly to the volume of sound, also to skilful contrasts in *timbre* and mass. Thus Méhul employed the choir with harp and horn accompaniment as a contrast to the grand orchestra of 100 executants (in the Chant du 25 Messidor, 14 July 1800).

M. Saint-Saëns says that Méhul's instrumentation is very superior to that of his contemporaries and distinguishes him absolutely from other French composers of his period. He especially studied the effect of *timbre*, often seeking peculiar effects, such as muffling the drums (*Stratonice* overture), employing violas instead of violins (*Uthal*), and made unusually clever use of wind instruments. His overtures are often especially fine. M. Brancour



points out that Schubert studied them attentively and that Méhul's music was not without influence upon his own *Rosamund* and *Fierabras*. Méhul's overtures often anticipate the "Poèmes Symphoniques" of a later date (*e.g.*, especially those of *le Jeune Henri*, *Adrien*). He is sure that a revival of Méhul's best works would prove of interest and that not merely by way of historical reminiscence.

Cherubini compared his friend to Michael Angelo. "His style is broad and clear, tending rather towards forcible expression than towards grace and softness. He was the Michael Angelo rather than the Raphael of music."

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There is a certain monotony about the music written by these different composers for the fêtes of the Republic. They were often simply hymns or chants with the simplest harmony, accompanying, without any change or variation, a great number of verses. Gossec, however, composed a hymn for male choir in three parts to words by M. J. Chénier (14 July 1793). It apostrophised the "God of nations and of kings, of cities, of the country, of Luther, of Calvin, of the Children of Israel, the God worshipped by the Parsee when he acclaims the orb of Heaven. . . . Here in thy sight are assembled the sons and the support of France, celebrating the beginning of their happiness, equal among themselves as before Thee."

The "chants" glorify moral and civic virtues,

patriotic deeds, the laws of the Republic, the victories of its armies; they celebrate deliverance from tyrants and despots. They invoke Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Gratitude, Reason, the Supreme Being, the Eternal. Hymns were also provided for special occasions such as weddings, funerals, for the festivals of youth, of old age, of husbands and wives; for those engaged in the manufacture of cannons, gunpowder and saltpetre (as we should say, munitions). A hymn for these last was composed by Catel (1798). "Le Salpêtre republicain," set to music by Cherubini (in mild 6/8 time), breathed death and destruction to enemies (including Pitt), and declared that France had everything necessary to conquer her enemies excepting saltpetre, "therefore, brothers, let us work, etc. . . .": in fact a topical song, but both words and music seem uninspiring now.

The downfall of Robespierre was greeted by a "Dithyrambic Hymn" (Rouget de Lisle, 1794). The Reign of Terror was denounced: "They deceived us, invoking Liberty and planning Tyranny. By day they cursed kings . . . whilst by night they laid snares and dug pitfalls for the nation and its rights." An uninspiring subject for music was assigned to Lesueur (1798), "Dithyrambic Hymn for the triumphal entry of objects of science and art collected in Italy."

Gossec was the chief composer of this official music during the first years of the Revolution, but by 1800 he was an old man and Méhul took his

place. Gossec wrote a *Te Deum* for one of the earlier festivals (1790) in plain song but with an incongruous instrumental interlude consisting of dance airs. The *Marseillaise* was the only really inspired song of the Revolution.

## WORKS BY MÉHUL

*Operas*

1790. Euphrosine (3 acts). (Hoffman).  
1791. Cora (4 acts). (Valadier).  
1792. Stratonice (1 act). (Hoffman).  
1793. Le jugement de Paris (ballet 3 acts).  
(Gardel).  
— Le jeune Sage et le vieux Fou (1 act).  
Hoffman.  
1794. Horatius Coclès (1 act). Arnault.  
— Les Congrès des Rois (3 acts). (De-  
maillot). (In collaboration with other  
musicians).  
— Mélidore et Phrosine. (Arnault).  
— Timoléon (3 acts). (M. J. Chénier).  
1795. Doria ou la Tyrannie détruite (3 acts).  
(Legouvé and d'Avrigny).  
— La Caverne (3 acts). (Forgeot).  
1797. Le Pont de Lodi (1 act). (Delrien).  
1799. Adrien (3 acts). (Hoffman).  
— Ariodant (3 acts). (Hoffman).  
1800. Epicure (3 acts). (Demoustier). (Music  
in collaboration with Cherubini).  
— La Dansomanie (ballet 2 acts). (Gardel).  
— Bion (1 act). (Hoffman).  
1801. L'Irato (1 act). (Marsollier).

1802. Une Folie (2 acts). (Bouilly).  
— Le Trésor Supposé (1 act). (Hoffman).  
— Joanna (2 acts). (Marsollier).  
1803. Daphnis et Pandrose (ballet 2 acts).  
(Gardel).  
— Hélène (3 acts). (Bouilly).  
— Le Baiser et la Quittance (3 acts). (Picard). (Music in collaboration with Boieldieu, Kreutzer and Nicolo).  
— L'heureux malgré lui (2 acts). (Saint Just).  
1804. Les Hussites (3 acts). (A. Duval).  
1806. Les deux Aveugles de Tolède (1 act).  
(Marsollier).  
— Uthal (1 act). (Saint Victor).  
— Gabrielle d'Estrées (3 acts). (Saint Just).  
1807. Joseph (3 acts). (A. Duval).  
1810. Persée et Andromade (ballet, 3 acts).  
(Gardel).  
1811. Les Amazones ou la Fondation de Thèbes  
(3 acts). (Jouy).  
1813. Le Prince Troubadour (1 act). (A. Duval).  
1814. L'Oriflamme (1 act). (Etienne and Baour  
Lormain. (Music in collaboration with  
Berton, Kreutzer and Paër).  
1816. La Journée aux Aventures (3 acts). (Capelle and Mezières).  
1822. Valentine de Milan (4 acts). (Bouilly).  
This work, left unfinished by Méhul, was  
revised and completed by his nephew and  
pupil Daussoigne.

*Other Works*

1794. Le Chant du Depart. (M. J. Chénier).  
 — Hymne du 9 Thermidor. (M. J. Chénier).  
 — Chant des Victoires. (M. J. Chénier).  
 1795. Chant funèbre à la mémoire de Ferraud.  
 (Baour-Lormain).  
 1797. Hymne à la Paix. (C. Pipelet).  
 — Le Chant du retour. (M. J. Chénier).  
 1800. Chant national du 14 Juillet. (Fontanes).  
 1808. Chant du retour pour la Grande Armée.  
 (Arnault).  
 1810. Cantata for the marriage of Napoleon and  
 Marie Louise. (Arnault).  
 1811. Chant d'Ossian for the birth of the King  
 of Rome. (Arnault).  
 1811. Chant lyrique (for the unveiling of Na-  
 poleon's statue). (Arnault).

Three overtures (one for brass instruments, one  
 for grand orchestra and one entitled "burlesque").

A solemn Mass for four voices.

*Domine salvam fac rempublicam* for two choirs  
 and two orchestras.

Four symphonies for grand orchestra. *Anacre-  
 on's Ode XIX.* and early sonatas for harpsichord,  
 songs, etc.

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CHAPTER VI

JEAN FRANCOIS LESUEUR

1760-1837



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JEAN FRANÇOIS LESUEUR  
1760-1837

LESUEUR was a contemporary of Méhul (whom, however, he outlived by some twenty years) and one of the little group of musicians who came unscathed through the storms of the Revolution. With Méhul and Boieldieu he first came into notice during the eventful decade 1790-1800. Lesueur's real importance lies not in his own compositions, but in his stimulating influence upon others. He was a musician with theories who wrote about his art, a fervent apostle of Programme music, convinced that music should be, essentially and before all things, imitative, descriptive. The most important and interesting result of his teaching is embodied in his pupil Berlioz, who was greatly influenced by his ideas. "Lesueur's best work is Berlioz," says M. Octave Fouque.

Born about 1760 in the little hamlet Plessier near Abbeville, Jean François Lesueur was of humble birth, his parents being poor peasant folk.<sup>1</sup> Natur-

<sup>1</sup> Some biographers say he was a grandson of the painter of the same name.

ally he had no opportunities of hearing music other than that supplied by the village church (it had no organ) or rustic songs. His musical faculty awoke suddenly one day when, for the first time, he heard the strains of a military band as it marched through the village. The blending of different instruments flashed like a dazzling vision on the little boy (he was only about seven years old). "Many tunes at once!" (*plusieurs airs à la fois*) he exclaimed, and ran after the wonderful music far beyond the village, until he fell down exhausted.

His parents, impressed by this incident, placed him at a monastery school where he remained several years.

There was no lack of schools of music in France at that time, but the teaching they offered was very poor, far inferior to contemporary standards in either Italy or Germany. There was no instruction in counterpoint or harmony at this particular school, but "music" on general lines was taught in the mornings and Latin in the afternoons. Lesueur had the advantage of both.<sup>1</sup> At the age of sixteen he was sent to another monastery and

<sup>1</sup> Under the monarchy the church or monastic schools were the only places where music was taught. Every cathedral had its school (there were about 130 cathedrals in France), and many monasteries had their schools of music. Parents had to sign an agreement that their children should remain ten years in these schools, after which some pupils became priests, others organists or singers, others again took up secular music in orchestras or theatres. Altogether there were some 800 schools of music in France, but there was no universal standard and the quality of instruction depended entirely on the teachers. Musicians suffered from the lack of systematic instruction (e.g., Rameau and Grétry).

choir school at Seiz in Normandy, and presently was studying in Paris under the Abbé Roze, being himself an underteacher at the Innocents. (His own idea of study at this time was Plain song). At this youthful age he was passed on as choirmaster to Dijon, Le Mans, Tours; 1784 finds him back in Paris as *Maître de Chapelle* at the Innocents, after passing an examination conducted by Grétry, Gossec and Philidor. The last-named was the Director of the "Concerts Spirituels" (religious music) and at these Lesueur's Motets were performed. In the same year he set to music an Ode by J. B. Rousseau, which was highly praised. Sacchini and other friends urged him to write for the stage, and he did, in fact, write an opera, *Télémaque*, but it was not produced. Ecclesiastical music interested him more than any other at this period; he was anxious to make the music of church ceremonial of greater importance, more dramatic in style than it had hitherto been. He began to carry out his ideas after being appointed to the important post of *Maître de Chapelle* at Notre Dame (1786), and a few years later introduced music on a grand scale. At Easter, for instance, he was allowed to engage an orchestra of 100 performers and singers from the opera.<sup>1</sup>

But this was only a small portion of his dreams. With the idea of stimulating emotional and relig-

<sup>1</sup> Lully, it may be recalled, had been the first to introduce other instruments besides the organ into church services, in spite of opposition.

ious feeling, he tried to illustrate the Liturgy and the various events celebrated on festival days by musical illustration, really a kind of religious music Drama. One of his masses was in fact preceded by an overture. These novelties attracted crowds, especially of the poorer classes, and Lesueur's services began to be known as the Beggars' Opera ("L'Opéra des Gueux"). Marie Antoinette was interested in the innovation and she, too, came to the services. But the church dignitaries disapproved, finding such experiments too costly; presently the Chapter cut down the orchestra and insisted that Lesueur should take orders. (He took the title "Abbé," but refused to become a priest).

In reply to criticisms he wrote a pamphlet explaining his ideas: "Essai de musique sacrée, ou musique motivée et méthodique pour la fête de Noël" (1786). In this and subsequent articles he shews himself an ardent champion of Programme music. He wishes to see imitative, descriptive music for each solemnity of the church service. For Easter Day, e.g., an instrumental prelude with passages from a Motet describing the Resurrection; Mary Magdalen and the Apostles, the Choir of the Faithful are all represented by soli or chorus.

For Christmas he produced a kind of descriptive oratorio on the birth of Christ: music of a calm and pastoral character indicating the peaceful night with shepherds tending their flocks; then the sud-

den appearance of angels, the alarm of the shepherds, their march to Bethlehem. The music for this "Plan pour la messe de Noël" still exists.

The Overture begins with prophecies relating to the birth of the Messiah: "An imposing passage performed by all strings and wind instruments, mingled with the sombre strains of trombones, whose timbre (according to several authors) greatly resembles that of the religious trumpets of the ancient High Priests. After which three trombones alone herald . . . a music with solemn gloomy harmony, inspiring a certain reverential awe. Then a voice announces in prophetic tones *ecce dies veniunt*, etc. The march of the Shepherds is to be "religious yet joyous," in Sapphic metre. To this the shepherds sing "laudamus te," whilst altos, 'cellos and horns are heard in the familiar carol, "Où s'en vont ces gais bergers?" ("Whither go these joyous shepherds?"). (Lesueur used familiar airs in order to attract the attention of ordinary folk).

The music of church festivals under Lesueur thus became a kind of oratorio with motets and a large orchestra, entailing an immense amount of work. The young Abbé had not only to train his choirs and musicians but to make arrangements for housing and feeding many of the orchestra and singers. At Easter (1787), when the festival extended over several days, he had only time to sleep an hour or two at a time for nearly a fortnight. He was ill paid for all this and the dis-

approval of church dignitaries complicated matters. They were anxious to get rid of him and when he applied for temporary leave of absence (intending to go to England and make a little money by giving concerts), the Chapter accepted his temporary resignation as final.

Thus Lesueur found himself stranded. Many critics, however, approved of his ideas and Chénier wrote a poem expressing his admiration for the church and the musician who had done so much in its service. More practical help came from a Canon of Notre Dame, who offered him a home in his country house. Here he found shelter for a couple of years.

A librettist had already suggested the greater possibilities of opera and in this country retreat Lesueur now began to write dramatic music, composing *La Caverne ou le Repentir* (a plot which afterwards attracted Méhul).

The plot (taken from *Gil Blas*) was as gloomy as its title and frankly melodramatic. A young girl, prisoner in a cave of banditti, is protected by the noble and generous chief, who turns out to be her brother. The setting of the opera was unusual, the stage being divided (as in *Aïda*) into two storeys, with the cavern below and a forest above. Lesueur, who was fond of double effects of music as well as of double scenes, introduced a quartette above with a chorus of bandits below. *La Caverne* was extremely well received (February 1793) and remained on the bills throughout this



year of Terror, although the title "Abbé" was not calculated to make the composer popular. For a time he was "suspect."

In the following year *Paul et Virginie ou le Triomphe de la Vertu* was also a success. The scene of the tempest was considered very fine, although later generations find it childish. It shares the fate of descriptive music, so largely dependent on the means of expression; in the words of M. Fouque, "descriptive music does not grow old, it disappears." (In this opera the story has a happy ending, Virginie being rescued by Paul). *Télémaque dans l'Ile de Calypso ou le Triomphe de la sagesse* (May 1796) was another triumph, also for the composer, in spite of its unsuccessful imitation of Greek music (which always attracted Lesueur). The overture in the Hypo Dorian mode was praised by Berlioz.

In other respects Lesueur prospered during this decade, being appointed Professor at the Ecole de la garde nationale (1793) and Inspecteur at the Conservatoire on its foundation in 1795. With Méhul, Gossec, Catel, he drew up plans of study, etc. But his own pamphlet, "Projet d'un plan général de l'instruction musicale en France" (1801), raised a storm of disapproval and was the cause of his dismissal from this post in the following year. He was once more reduced to poverty, all the more keenly felt because he was at this time supporting his old father and other relatives. In absolute despair and by way of protest against

the action of the Conservatoire and the Opera he wrote a curious letter to Napoleon, with a copy of his pamphlet, a letter which shews something of Lesueur's mental outlook, that of the recluse grotesquely out of touch with real life. (He uses throughout the classical "thou.").

"To the greatest of men!

"Will you grant me a few moments of the time which you employ for the world's happiness? I should never stoop to exchange the sentiments of honour and independence for the lying arts of courtiers. Let someone read to you the advice which the Graces and Orpheus proffer through my feeble utterance. Terpander and Timotheus argued of such things before Alexander. The hero listened with interest. He was just towards them. You owe me justice, I await it.

"Salut et respect,

"LESUEUR."

Probably Napoleon never received this epistle, but not long afterwards Paisiello returned to Naples, leaving his post at court vacant. This post, Director of Music to the First Consul (the one declined by Méhul) was now bestowed on Lesueur and henceforth his position was assured.

His opera *Ossian ou les Bardes* was performed at the Opéra with immense success (10 July 1804). Napoleon (an enthusiastic admirer of "Ossian's" poems) was present at the first performance, sent

for Lesueur and made him sit in his box "to enjoy his triumph." Next day he received the Cross of the Legion of Honour and a snuff box containing a large sum of money and engraved with the words, "The Emperor of the French to the author of the *Bardes*."

The opera was a success financially as well as musically, the receipts for the first performance (18,000 francs) being considered phenomenal. Thus by a sudden turn of fortune's wheel Lesueur became a rich and successful man. Two years later he married a woman of intelligence, Mlle. Adeline Jamart de Courchamps, who made him an excellent wife, being endowed with the practical common sense which Lesueur so painfully lacked.<sup>1</sup>

For Napoleon's Coronation (December 2 1804) he composed a *Te Deum* and Mass, and in 1807 he produced another opera, *le Triomphe de Trajan*, really celebrating the clemency of the Emperor towards Prince Hatzfeldt, who had conspired against his life. The plot, in which many persons of the highest rank were implicated, was discovered before it could be carried out, and Princess Hatzfeldt hastened to implore the Emperor's pardon for her husband. Napoleon threw the documents implicating him into the fire, saying, "No one can accuse your husband, Madame, you see there are no proofs against him." This incident inspired the librettist Esménard for his opera *Trajan*. It was magnificently staged and aroused immense enthusi-

<sup>1</sup> Napoleon and Josephine signed his *Contrat de Mariage* (1806)

asm, the allusion to Napoleon being recognised by everybody. *Trajan* was performed more than a hundred times and was afterwards revived, always with great success. Lesueur's *Marche triomphale* became very popular.

Other works of this period were his religious music for the Tuileries chapel and cantatas on biblical subjects (Ruth and Naomi, Rachel, Deborah). More ambitious was his *Mort d'Adam et son Apotheose*, performed (21 March 1809) with magnificent scenery. This "antediluvian" subject and many peculiarities in its treatment gave cause for much hostile criticism, but the music contains some beautiful passages in spite of the extreme simplicity of harmony and instrumentation. It is said that Beethoven, reading the score shortly before his death, thought some of the music "angelic."

In 1813 Lesueur succeeded Grétry as member of the Institut. The downfall of Napoleon, to whom he was sincerely and devotedly attached, came as a crushing blow to the musician, although it did not deprive him of his position or honour. He was appointed Surintendant of the Chapel of Louis XVIII, although he made no secret of his unshaken loyalty to Napoleon. He refused a Court decoration higher than the one he had received from the Emperor, saying that he wished for nothing higher than that of the Legion of Honour bestowed by his late master, and the new court respected his loyalty. From 1st January 1818, he was Professor of Composition at the Conservatoire; his lectures were

brilliant and he proved himself a splendid teacher, inspiring and stimulating his pupils in an extraordinary degree. He respected the individuality in each, seeking to develop each pupil's natural bent rather than insisting on stereotyped routine. Fourteen of his pupils gained the *Grand Prix*; among them were Berlioz, Ambroise Thomas, Gounod. (Ambroise Thomas, who was nervous and timid, he always called his "sensitive" note). Apart from the relation of master and pupil there was a strong tie of sympathy and friendship between Lesueur and Berlioz, although, when the latter grew older, he pronounced some of his master's theories "antiquated" and his teaching of harmony absolutely lost time. When Beethoven's C Minor Symphony (the musical touchstone in those days) was performed in Paris for the first time, Berlioz, immediately and wildly enthusiastic, was impatient with Lesueur's attitude of reserve. And Berlioz kept his own later works from his old master as long as possible—a significant attitude. But, although in technical details and means of expression Berlioz so far surpassed his master, he was deeply influenced by his ideals and theories. "Berlioz is only a successful Lesueur, and Lesueur an unrealised Berlioz," says M. Fouque,—“Lesueur may be regarded as a prophet, a forerunner of Berlioz.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Another critic, M. Laffon, considers his influence upon Gounod to have been equally great, especially as regards modulation. Lesueur, he says, was the first to teach modulating by means of the diminished seventh chord and its enharmonic changes.

Lesueur died 6th October, 1837.

Fifteen years later his pupil, Ambroise Thomas, composed a "Song of Triumph" for the inauguration of his statue in Abbeville.

In personal appearance Lesueur was not unlike an ascetic monk. He had fine clearly cut features with an expression of nobility and sweetness; he was extraordinarily pale and thin.

Very upright and sincere, he was almost childishly unworldly; in his lessons he never failed to mention his three ideals: Homer, the Bible, Napoleon. He was a loyal and devoted friend, witness the instance of his allowing a pupil (one Marc), to bring out an opera in his (Lesueur's) name in order to "give the young composer a better chance."

Lesueur's music, like himself, is a mixture of simplicity and complexity. He was a poet, a philosopher and a writer, as well as a musician, and was full of ideas which were too difficult of execution, especially with his primitive notions of harmony. His *chants* are composed of concords; severe in style, he even modulates with concords, never with a Seventh. Usually he keeps one harmony through an entire bar. But his effects were intended for big churches and in cathedrals with vaulted roofs they were at home. Even Cherubini, whose music was so much more scholarly, varied—in fact developed—far superior to Lesueur's in the concert room, even he acknowledged that Lesueur's music was much more impressive than his own

when heard in its proper setting, within the stone walls of a vast cathedral. Gounod called Lesueur's music "Mediaeval frescoes, byzantine mosaics," and Berlioz said that his "Ruth" was so true in its antique colouring that one forgets the poor-ness of Lesueur's musical design, his imitations of old Italian dramatic style and the childish weak-ness of his instrumentation. In any case Lesueur was the first to introduce expressive religious music in France. He disliked fugues "which describe nothing and whose only aim is to display the empty science of counterpoint and the conquest of difficulties," (he wrote in 1787). It is remarkable that he never changed his convictions and opinions on musical matters. When quite a young man his ideals were formulated and he remained true to them all his life. To understand his musical atti-tude one must remember that when Lesueur was a young man the works of Sebastian Bach were scarcely known in France. Haydn and Mozart had not yet produced their best works and were also unknown; his own musical education had been of the scantiest. His ideas were his own and dis-tinctly modern in spirit, although he did not possess technical knowledge sufficient to carry them out on modern lines. He found it necessary to distribute leaflets explaining the music, when his oratorios or music dramas were performed; some of his ideas being absolutely incompatible with musical expression and some of the music impossible to understand without explanation.



Later he wrote rules for composing expressive music, for the guidance of pupils.<sup>1</sup>

Such instructions sound obvious nowadays. In setting to music the Psalm, "By the Waters of Babylon," for instance, the music should convey the idea of the rushing river with its waterfalls, the winds, the Hebrews' sad songs, and their musical instruments. He suggests such devices as syncopated figures, strings *vibrato*, etc. The music for Christmas—already described—(still extant) is on the same lines. Unfortunately Lesueur did not show the same dramatic instinct in his operas; neither he nor Berlioz were good operatic composers.

Lesueur's opponents disapproved of his literary attempts. A musician should keep to his music, they said, and in those days musicians were supposed to be lacking both in general education and common sense. This made him indignant. A musician was not expected to quote Latin! "Are we then forbidden education?" He showed that he was quite able to quote Latin authors and wrote learnedly of derivations of words and on Greek music—a subject which fascinated him deeply. He disliked the piano intensely, as a mechanical in-

1 "Exposé d'une musique, une, imitative et particulière à chaque solennité; où l'auteur à la suite de ce qu'il a déjà publié à ce sujet, donne à ceux de ses élèves qui se destinent à composer la musique de nos temples les préceptes qu'il leur a cru nécessaires pour mettre le plus de *poésie*, de *peinture* et d'*expression* possible dans leurs ouvrages. Il donne aussi le plan d'une musique propre à la fête de l'Assomption."



strument without colour, a dislike shared by Berlioz.

Lesueur took part with other musicians in composing music for the Fêtes of the Revolution. He was requested by Lucien Bonaparte (minister of the Interior) to compose a Hymn for 1 Vendémiaire An IX, the occasion being a grand national fête in honour of Peace. Méhul's famous Hymn with its three orchestras was now surpassed by Lesueur, who employed four orchestras for his Symphonic Ode. Each orchestra expressed a different emotion: "the joyous murmur of the crowd returning from some solemnity," another in more animated strains, a third expressing the highest "exaltation" of huge crowds; the fourth has unfortunately disappeared without a trace. Sarette was ordered to publish this composition, but neglected to do so, and we possess no compositions by Lesueur for orchestra alone. He produced music for *Chants* dedicated to Agriculture, to Old Age, and a "Dithyrambic Hymn for the triumphal entry of objects of art and science collected in Italy (1798)."

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CHAPTER VII  
LUIGI CHERUBINI  
1760-1842



## CHAPTER VII

LUIGI CHERUBINI

1760—1842

CHERUBINI is usually reckoned among the musicians of France, and he allied himself more to the French School than to any other, but in reality he was never completely representative of French music. His opera was neither wholly French nor wholly Italian, and he exercised no lasting influence upon operatic music in either France or Italy.

He is one of those who close an epoch rather than begin one, resuming in himself all the learning and technical skill of his predecessors, producing masterly works on well-known lines, especially on those of old Italian Church Music, but he did not found a school of church music any more than one of Opera. "The last and noblest Roman in the purely classical style of art," his music was perfect, intellectual, noble, but French popular taste found it too "learned" (the fatal reproach levelled at Rameau). Cherubini's aim was pure music, not impressionism or programme music. Critics reproached him for adopting the

German style which prefers instrumental effects to expressive melody, and said it was "easier to produce harmonies and noise, effects of purely technical calculation, than to create song." The word *tudesque* always conveys this idea in French criticism from Rameau downwards.

Cherubini was of course appreciated by musicians—and in fact more in Germany than in France—which is not surprising. Beethoven admired his skill, earnestness and depth of feeling, even thought him the "greatest opera composer living"; the two became friends during Cherubini's stay in Vienna, 1805. Haydn, too, was enthusiastic, but the very qualities which made him respected by serious musicians were against his becoming a popular favourite. Chiefly and especially, however, because he was no innovator, had no new message to deliver. He was not of those whose originality makes them unpopular at first, but who win through by sheer force of new and fertile ideas. Cherubini was classical, a great worker on traditional lines—a follower, not a prophet—and as such without vivifying influence. Although he became naturalised in France, identified with the little band of musicians who passed through the Revolution, composing with them the Republican festival music and sharing their dangers (at the time of the execution of Louis XVI Cherubini was hiding in a monastery near Rouen), although he took high rank as a musician, his music was never popular. It was too serious, too dry, too

"learned." Cherubini came to Paris at the age of 28 and remained there for the rest of his long life.

Born in Florence (14 September 1760), the son of a harpsichord player at the Pergola Theatre, Luigi Cherubini (his names were Maria Luigi Carlo Zenobi Salvatore) had a sound musical training on Italian lines, chiefly under Sarti at Bologna, a severe master of the traditional Contrapuntal school, terribly pedantic. Among other things he made his pupils copy immense quantities of old musical compositions. The habit of copying clung to Cherubini and some thousands of such MS. folios were found in his study when he died. His early operas in Italy were considered even then very "solid" and learned, but he was sufficiently known to be invited to London and was appointed Composer to the King (1784), a post which he only held one year, however. Two of his operas, performed at the King's Theatre, Haymarket, were failures (1785) and in 1788 he went to Paris. He arrived at the time when Marie Antoinette's Italian hair dresser was "running" opera, and through him obtained the post of Musical Director to the Italian Opera.

His opera *Lodoïska* (18 July 1791) aroused controversy, but the composer was henceforth recognised, even famous. The scene was laid in Poland, the unhappy country then beginning to offer dramatic possibilities. The heroine, Lodoïska, is a prisoner in the castle of Dourlinski who loves

her, whilst she prefers Floriska. Her lover comes in disguise, pretending to be her brother and begging for her release that she may return home. Dourlinski's suspicions are aroused, and he discovers Floriska drugging the soldiers. But, when all seems lost, the castle is suddenly stormed by Tartars and Lodoïska escapes with her lover. Cherubini's music was rich in orchestral colouring and harmonic combinations, far superior in every way to the weak, trivial music then in vogue. *Lodoïska* was performed 200 times in one year, in spite of the large numbers of the public who preferred the lighter style of Paisiello and other Italian composers. The struggles of Cherubini to raise opera to a higher level recall in some measure the old war of Gluckistes and Piccinnistes, although in those revolutionary days questions of music became of secondary importance and the struggle was perhaps more one of conflicting instincts than of conscious partisanship and aims.

In 1794 *Eliza*, on a stupid libretto by St. Cyr, introduced the Monastery of St. Bernard, the Prior and monks, travellers seeking shelter, amongst whom Florindo, a disconsolate lover, and Eliza, whom he believes faithless. After due misunderstandings Florindo is overwhelmed by an avalanche, rescued, reconciled to his lady. Cherubini's music was wasted on this subject and not even the singing of the famous Madame Scio could save it from failure.

In the following year (1795) came Cherubini's



appointment as Inspecteur and Professor of Counterpoint at the Conservatoire de Musique, and in the same year his marriage to a Frenchwoman, Mlle. Cécile Tourette, the beautiful daughter of a Court musician. At the Conservatoire he was associated with Méhul and other friends among the musicians with whom he had shared the perils of the Reign of Terror. An incident in the preceding year shows that nationality was not respected during that period. Cherubini was in the street one day when a band of lawless citizens came along, singing and shouting. Recognising Cherubini as the artist once in favour with royalty, they insisted that he should lead them. He refused until a friend, caught by the same mob, hastily thrust a violin into his hands and told him to play. The two musicians were dragged about the whole day by the crowd. In the evening they were seen mounted on barrels playing, literally, for dear life, whilst a banquet was going on in the market-place around them.

*Medée* (1797) contains some of the best of Cherubini's dramatic music: The Bridal March in Act II and the Storm scene, in which Medea makes a fine entry, are held as masterpieces, and there is a beautiful duet for Medea and Jason. The overture, like other overtures by Cherubini, is a fine example of pure music (not a "programme" overture). The plot follows the lines of the Greek tragedy. Unfortunately the part of Medea was not well written for the voice, the famous Madame

Scio found it very trying, and, partly for this reason, the opera was seldom staged, even in Germany where Cherubini was so well appreciated.<sup>1</sup>

Cherubini's most popular success, a masterpiece of its kind, was his two-act opera, *Les deux journées* ("The two days"), produced 1800. The plot was of human interest; the music more melodious, expressive and light than that of *Medée*. The scene depicted Paris about 1647 and the story concerned a French Minister of Parliament threatened by Mazarin with arrest, who escapes from the city by the help of a water carrier. (In Germany the opera is known as the "Water Carrier"). Bouilly, who had gained several years' experience by this time, had at last written a really good libretto: Goethe, at any rate, considered it excellent. The music ranks among Cherubini's most inspired, brilliantly orchestrated and rich in harmonic colour. There are only a few solo airs; chorus and concerted pieces being the strong feature of this work.

Beethoven<sup>2</sup> admired it so much that he kept the score constantly by him, whilst Spohr sat up all

1 *Medée* was performed at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, as late as 1865 with Mlle. Tietjens as Medea.

2 Although Beethoven admired Cherubini so greatly, it does not appear that Cherubini on his side understood Beethoven or his aims fully. He observed that "Beethoven was always brusque" in manner and after hearing the first performance of *Fidelio* in Vienna, he merely said of the Overture (Leonora in C) that one could not tell what key it was in from beginning to end. Yet he recognised Beethoven as a mighty genius, beside whom he was "only a small boy."

night studying it and declared that this music was the first which inspired him to compose.

From *Anacréon*, three years later, the overture again may be singled out.

In response to an invitation to write an opera for Vienna and conduct it in person, Cherubini composed *Faniska*, a three-act opera, performed (25 February 1806) in Vienna. The Emperor and a splendid retinue did honour to the performance and the composer; mingling in the humbler crowd the presence of Beethoven and Haydn was at least an equal honour. *Faniska* was received with enthusiasm by the music-loving Viennese. High and low, musicians and critics, all were unanimous in praise.

The plot of *Faniska* is absurdly like that of *Lodoïska* (libretto by Sonnleithner from a French melodrama called "The Polish Mines"). *Lodoïska*, by the way, was very popular in Vienna, and the similarity of the subjects was due to the universal sympathy and enthusiasm for Poland. At this period the Poles were fighting heroically for freedom, and Western Europe sympathised with them. In *Faniska* the heroine, by way of variety, is married, and with her infant daughter is imprisoned in the "tyrant's" castle. Her husband comes to the rescue. With the improbable ingenuity of the stage, he pretends to be a messenger bearing the tidings of his own death, and thus gains admittance, but he betrays himself on seeing his little daughter, and all three are cast into subterranean dungeons. Their attempts to escape are frustrated (once they

try to get out of the window, another time they are hauled up in baskets, all clumsy expedients for the stage), but finally devoted friends storm the castle with an army of soldiers and rescue the prisoners. A Viennese criticism remarked that the music, "except where it is too full of art and skill, is perfectly worthy of the master; strong, deep, fiery and characteristic, supported by all the resources of harmony, sometimes even too richly supported."<sup>1</sup> This passage is worth quoting because it seems to sum up nearly all criticism of Cherubini's music. Cherubini had brought his wife and three children to Vienna and would in all probability have settled there, but scarcely was the success of *Faniska* assured than war broke out between France and Austria. After the battle of Austerlitz the French entered the capital and Napoleon took up his quarters in Schönbrunn. Finding Cherubini on the spot, he made him Director of Music, that is, of the daily routine of Court concerts, etc., a post which took up time, but brought with it neither money nor fame. Music in the domain of opera came to a stand-still, no one went to the theatre in those fateful days. Beethoven's *Fidelio* was performed a week after Napoleon's arrival to an almost empty house, (afterwards withdrawn and "shelved" for several years). . . . It was certainly Cherubini's unlucky star which brought Napoleon to Vienna just at that moment. Disappointed in his hopes of success, broken down and ill at the failure of this apparently

<sup>1</sup> *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*. June, 1806.

promising visit, he returned to Paris, resolved to write no more operas.

It was unfortunate for Cherubini that Napoleon never liked him or his music, and, in consequence, ungenerously refused to help or distinguish him in any way. Perhaps Cherubini was tactless; he was notoriously blunt and rather irritable in temper; certainly he took no pains to conciliate the Emperor, whom he pronounced an entirely unmusical nature. "Napoleon did not like music because he did not understand it. To him it was a noise which affected his nerves disagreeably." Cherubini once told him, "Sire, you like music which does not hinder you from thinking about State affairs." Further he declared, "He demanded of me music devoid of common sense, and, as I was responsible for the arrangements of the concerts, I would not give in to him. Then he was annoyed at my resistance and made satirical remarks which I pretended not to understand."<sup>1</sup> An amusing picture of the struggle between the Man of Destiny and an obstinate musician. "I cannot understand your music, it is so noisy and complicated—too learned and too *tudesque*," Napoleon told Cherubini. He had said the same thing to Méhul, who was not at all offended by the criticism. Probably Napoleon, genuinely interested in most things, would have enjoyed an argument about music, but Cherubini replied coldly that he could not adapt his music to his hearer's intellectual ca-

<sup>1</sup> Pougin in "Ménestrel."

capacity. Napoleon was always ungenerous, even petty, in his treatment of the great composer. He refused him the "Legion of Honour" when Gossec, Méhul and Grétry were decorated (1802), and Cherubini remained simply a salaried professor at the Conservatoire, a poor man until he was nearly sixty, for his operas brought in very little money. He only received due recognition in his old age after Napoleon's downfall.<sup>1</sup> Thoroughly discouraged as regards opera, he even left Paris for a time and retired to the country as the guest of the Prince de Chimay. For a time he gave up composing and devoted himself to the study of botany, perhaps inspired by the example of his friend Méhul, who found solace in flowers from the disappointments of an artistic career. In this retreat Cherubini was asked to compose a mass for the little church at Chimay. At first he refused, but afterwards composed a short mass for three voices, which was performed by the village choir with simple orchestra (string quartet, one flute, two horns, two clarinets, one bassoon).

The mass was such a success that it was afterwards performed in Paris (enlarged and with fuller instrumentation). This was in 1809.

Cherubini now seemed to have found his real vocation and composed beautiful church music, such as the Requiem Mass (C minor), which he wrote for

<sup>1</sup> During the "Hundred Days" Napoleon made a tardy recognition by bestowing the "Legion of Honour" upon him.

the anniversary of Louis XVI's death (performed in St. Denis, 1817).

Berlioz declared that this was, on the whole, Cherubini's greatest work, surpassing all his other compositions in form, variety of conception and sublimity. "The *Agnus Dei* in *decrescendo* surpasses all that has been written of this kind. The vocal style is clear and sharply outlined, the instrumentation richly coloured and strong." The Grand Mass (D minor), composed during 1811, is the longest mass ever composed, a monument of learning and skill, yet devotional in spirit. Another beautiful work was the "Coronation" Mass (in A), performed in Rheims Cathedral at the Coronation of Charles X. Of this, too, Berlioz wrote with enthusiasm, especially of the "sublime" Communion March. In all church music Cherubini displayed his absolute mastery of form and of all musical technique, polyphonic and harmonic, with noble expression and breadth of style. His masses were in fact monuments—to the past, however—to the purest traditions of Italian church music. (His was "the purest church music since Palestrina"). But he did not found a school of sacred music, any more than one of opera; he remained a master of the classical, severely aloof from the operatic tendency in church music which was then coming into favour in Italy, to culminate in Rossini's *Stabat Mater*. Had Cherubini lived later he would doubtless have been a great composer of symphonic and other orchestral music.



He tempted fortune again (vainly) with two small operas, *Pygmalion* and *Le Crescendo* (1809 and 1810). A larger work, *Les Abencerages*, on a weak libretto by Bouilly (1813) had also no success, although long afterwards Mendelssohn discovered many beauties in the score, writing enthusiastically about its "original phrasing, its extraordinary refinement and delicacy. I cannot admire it enough or feel sufficiently grateful to the grand old man for composing this music. Besides, it is all so free."

A final operatic venture was *Ali Baba*, produced 1833, when Cherubini was over seventy (he had originally commenced it in his youth under the title "Kourkourgi").

The dramatic story of the Forty Thieves had grown into an inordinately long opera (four acts and a prologue), very well written and full of musical scholarship, but alas! not sufficiently living to become popular. It was, in a word, dull. Berlioz was ostentatiously bored by the "operatic fossil."

Cherubini, Professor, Examiner and Director of the Conservatoire, was a fine teacher, a purist, even a pedant, intolerant of shallowness and triviality. He condemned as decadent compositions which were merely pleasing, especially when lacking thorough mastery of technique. "A beacon warning from the trivial and tawdry," says Professor Frederick Crowest. He was absolute master in the art of polyphonic music and wrote a "Treatise on Counterpoint and Fugue" (1835) for his pupils.



Among them were Auber, Carafa, Halévy, Zimmermann. Berlioz, when a student, delighted in making the irascible Cherubini angry. As a revolutionary Modern he was proud to "shock the old master by my heterodoxy in the matter of harmony and rhythm." Cherubini's thick Italian accent clung to him all his life and was the subject of irreverent mirth. But his pupils were devoted to their splendid teacher and he took a fatherly interest in them. With Cherubini art was religion. In all seriousness he said to Boieldieu *à propos* of his early, facile successes: "Are you not ashamed to enjoy such splendid success when you have done so little to deserve it?" The younger man admitted the justice of this criticism and set himself to study under Cherubini, to the great advantage of his later works. The two became firm friends. About 1798 they collaborated in three little operas, and often in "occasional" works for the Revolution.

In spite of his caustic temper Cherubini had many devoted friends, among the musicians especially, and always proved himself sincere, loyal, generous in his friendships. He stood by Lesueur, for instance, in his early struggles, and many years later (in 1816), when offered the post of Surintendant of the King's music (under Louis XVIII), he refused unless he could share it with Lesueur, which was permitted. Like all who live to a great age, he had the misfortune of outliving most of his contemporaries: Méhul, to whom he was greatly attached, Catel ("Mon bien-aimé Catel"), Boiel-

dieu, not to speak of older comrades like Grétry and Gossec. He suffered bereavements in his own family too; the death of his son-in-law was an especially heavy blow to the old man. At the age of 82 he resigned his post at the Conservatoire and died shortly afterwards, 15 March 1842. "The last and noblest Roman in the purely classical style of art,"<sup>1</sup> his character, like his music, was of rare integrity and nobility.

Among the pieces composed by Cherubini for the Fêtes of the Revolution the most important is the *Hymne du Panthéon*, words by Chénier (1794). A *Hymne funèbre* for the death of General Hoche was performed with scenic illustrations (1797).

*À Chant républicain pour la fête du 10 Août* 1795, with orchestral accompaniment, is strong and energetic, but not arresting or inspiring. Shorter pieces were *Le Salpêtré républicain* ("Descendons dans nos souterrains"), performed at the opening of the Saltpetre works;<sup>2</sup> Hymn for the *Fête de la reconnaissance* (Gratitude), which was to replace Whitsuntide; and a Hymn to Youth (for Easter, for which Cherubini used the melody of one of his Italian Nocturnes).

<sup>1</sup> Baillot.

<sup>2</sup> *Citoyens* "digging fiercely, each in his own cellar, for saltpetre." (Carlyle).

# WORKS BY CHERUBINI

(after his arrival in France)

## *Operas*

- 1788. Démophon.
- 1791. Lodoïska.
- 1794. Eliza.
- 1797. Médée.
- 1798. L'Hôtellerie Portugaise.
- 1799. La Puntion.
- 1800. Les deux Jounées.
- 1803. Anacréon.
- 1806. Faniska.
- 1809. Pygmalion.
- 1810. Le Crescendo.
- 1813. Les Abencérages.
- 1833. Ali Baba.
- 1808-1825. Eight Masses.
- 1816 and 1836. Two Requiem Masses.

*Vocal Compositions:* Motets, Cantatas, Odes,  
Credos, Hymns.

*Instrumental Compositions:* Marches, Quartetts,  
Sonatas, one Symphony.

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CHAPTER VIII

FRANCOIS ADRIEN BOIELDIEU

1775-1834



## CHAPTER VIII

FRANÇOIS ADRIEN BOIELDIEU

1775-1834

BOIELDIEU (familiar to us chiefly, perhaps, by his overtures *Caliph of Bagdad* and *La Dame Blanche*) seems comparatively near our own day, and one is apt to forget that he was born before the French Revolution and achieved his first successes during the Reign of Terror. He was born 17th December 1775, in Rouen, in a house still standing at the corner of the Rue aux Ours (now adorned with a tablet and bust), and was christened, François Adrien, in the adjacent Church of St. Pierre. He came of a good *bourgeois* family; his father being not without literary tastes, for in after years he wrote verses for his son to set to music. Like most other young musicians of those pre-conservatoire days, François was placed in a choir school. This particular choir was attached to the Cathedral of Rouen, and the master, one Broche, was very severe and bad-tempered. Once, indeed, the little boy ran away from home after upsetting an inkpot upon a score he was copying for the master, not daring to face the consequences of his crime. The

great musical event of his boyhood was the performance of Grétry's *Barbe Bleue* at Rouen, which revealed a new world of music and determined him to compose opera. Soon he began to write songs, which found favour in his native town, and he was called upon to compose a Hymn to Reason, a reflection in provincial Rouen of the revolutionary fêtes in Paris (1793). Two small operas, *La Fille Coupable* (1793) and *Rosalie et Mirza* (1795), were merely youthful essays of no importance. At a concert of his own compositions young Boieldieu showed courage, when the public began to clamour for the *Carmagnole* and insisted that he should play it. Very pale but calm, he pushed away the clavecin in disgust and left the platform, an act of defiance which passed fortunately without dangerous consequences.

But even in those troubled times young artists were attracted to Paris inevitably. It was the only place where a career, a reputation might be made, where, as Voltaire called it, "immortalité" awaited genius. Like Lully, Rameau, Grétry, Méhul—and how many others—Boieldieu arrived in Paris to tempt fortune, poor, unknown, with nothing on his side save youth and genius. It is wonderful how many have succeeded; there is no record of those who fail.

Boieldieu was twenty when he left home, for some reason secretly. He travelled part of the way in a cart, spent the night in a shepherd's hut and arrived in the capital with the sum of 18 francs in



his pocket, the score of an opera, and his good looks. These were undeniable, judging from a charming full-length portrait (at the age of twenty-five). He is standing by a harpsichord in a blue swallow-tail coat, close fitting yellow trousers and high boots, smiling, gracious, handsome. Soon, however, the young man was in despair, seriously considering the idea of throwing himself into the river, when a messenger from home found him and supplied him with money and letters of introduction. After this things improved. He earned money by tuning pianos at Erard's, and sang his own songs at the receptions in the Erard *salon*. His gift for composing "romances," drawing-room songs, was greatly admired, and even the important Marmontel condescended to write verses for them. Boieldieu made friends with Méhul and Cherubini, with Grétry, now growing elderly but still at the height of his fame.

Already in September of the same year (1795) a small work, *La dot de Suzette* (Jaure), was fairly successful, and in 1797 *La famille Suisse* (Saint Just) followed. It was not difficult for young composers to get a hearing in those days, there being a constant demand for short, light novelties.<sup>1</sup> The first real success was scored by *Zoraïme et Zulnare*, a three-act opera on an Oriental subject (by way of local colouring two camels appeared on the stage,

<sup>1</sup> In 1791, after the King's flight, no fewer than 17 new theatres were opened. People sought relief and distraction from the terrible strain of those times.

an apparently perennial attraction). The titles of operas about this date mark the beginning of the vogue for foreign, especially eastern subjects. Boieldieu wrote no fewer than ten operas before he was 25, eight of them poor.

*Beniowski ou les exilés de Kamschatka* was produced 8th June 1800. The libretto was by Alexandre Duval, originally conceived in 1794 during the Terror. Duval was supping with the famous actor Talma, who had a nervous presentiment that he was about to be arrested as "suspect." By way of support Duval stayed the night with his friend, but he could not sleep, haunted by the fear of a nightly police raid. He found the "Memoirs of Beniowski" and lay awake reading the book, which he afterwards used for his libretto. The subject was warlike: soldiers, battles, the burning of the fort of Kamschatka, and Boieldieu's spirited overture was effective. Grétry especially praised a clever touch in a chorus of conspirators who become suddenly silent on the approach of a hostile officer.

The *Calife de Bagdad* (one act) followed only six months later, a brilliant success. This opera was quite French in all but the name; there was not even an attempt at Oriental colouring in music or staging. (It was after *le Calife* that Cherubini reproached Boieldieu with his too facile success). In spite of "doing nothing to deserve it" the *Calife* attained a record of 700 consecutive performances. His next work showed distinct progress in the art

of composition, however; the study with Cherubini had borne fruit.

*Ma tante Aurore ou le Roman interrompu* ("Aunt Aurora or the interrupted Novel") was slight, graceful, amusing (13th January 1803), on a libretto by Deslonchamps, a native of Rouen. There is distinct originality in the character of la Tante Aurore, a confirmed reader of romantic novels. She cannot believe that her niece is really in love, because her love seems an everyday affair, devoid of romance.

" Je ne vous vois jamais rêveuse ;  
Vous faites vos quatre repas.  
Non ! Non ! ma nièce  
Vous n'aimez pas."

In order to gain her consent Julie and Georges plan an elopement, attacks by brigands, etc., all duly romantic episodes, until Aunt Aurora, convinced at last, permits the marriage.

This brightly written and amusing work was an immense success, and Boieldieu at the age of 27 found himself a famous composer, with Paris practically at his feet. His joyous good nature, *verve* and charm made him a favourite everywhere. So far fortune had certainly smiled upon him.

Unfortunately he made a terrible mistake by marrying a certain Mlle. Clotilde of doubtful reputation (19th March 1802). The union was so wretched that Boieldieu escaped from it early in the following year by accepting an invitation to Russia,

where he was received with honour and appointed *Maître de Chapelle* to the Tsar. Further, he was under contract to compose three new operas every year. There was quite a French colony in St. Petersburg at this time and French music was the fashion. The Opera was run by French artists. Boieldieu remained some eight years in Russia, until war was declared with France, when he was compelled to return to his own country. He wrote quite a number of operas during his sojourn, all entirely in the French style. His music shows no trace of Russian influence and he never seems to have been sufficiently interested in Russian folk songs to make any use of them, a point which shows the difference in outlook between the musicians of that period and more modern ones. His music, uninfluenced from without, remained stationary, and he was often greatly hampered by the want of French subjects for *libretti*. When composing *La jeune femme colère* (performed 1805) the librettist, Etienne, being in Paris, Boieldieu found collaboration extremely difficult in those days of slow communication, when it took a fortnight for a letter to reach Paris from Russia. It never occurred to him to use Russian subjects, perhaps, indeed, they would not have been appreciated had he done so. (Mlle. Vigée Lebrun, who also had spent some time in Russia, before Boieldieu, speaks of Russian folk-music as belonging solely to the people, "yet it possesses originality of a rather bar-

barous character; the songs are melodious and sad.”)

Boioldieu's first venture in St. Petersburg was *Aline reine de Golconde* (5 March 1804), an opera begun in Paris but dedicated to the Tsar. It was an Oriental subject like the *Calife*, but entirely French in treatment.

*Télémaque* was written to order for a Court festivity (1806), Dèstrois writing the libretto and Boioldieu the music, all within six weeks. The best of Boioldieu's operas of this period is *Les Voitures versées* (“Carriages upset”), on a subject taken from a French play, which happened to have been sent to Russia with other books. Dupaty was the author of this farcical comedy, which has for hero a poor country gentleman, obliged to live on his estate in the provinces, far from his adored Paris. In order to keep in touch with the “great world,” he keeps his roads in shocking repair—the roads to Paris—and every day carriages, carts, diligences are overturned near his château. He offers hospitality to the unfortunate travellers, thus securing a constant stream of visitors of all kinds who cheer his solitude by their society and bring the latest news from Paris. Every variety of character arrives, the diligence especially providing a fine variety of “types.” An amusing intrigue is woven around a young Parisian dandy who flirts with all the ladies in turn, sowing jealousy and discord, separating lovers, etc. Boioldieu was in his ele-

ment in this subject, his music was brilliant, full of life and gaiety, French in its elegance and finish.

Before the actual outbreak of war Boieldieu left Russia, being treated with the greatest consideration to the last, and departing laden with rich presents from the Tsar. As usual, he had conquered all hearts and everyone regretted his departure.

In the following year (1812) Boieldieu offered one of his best works to Paris : *Jean de Paris* (Saint Just), on an incident taken from mediæval times. The Dauphin of France, who is affianced to the Princesse of Navarre, wishes to gain her affection as a simple citizen, without royal rank or title. He travels as a rich *bourgeois*, "Monsieur Jean from Paris," with his servants and followers. The period favoured picturesque scenes and costumes; there were knights, troubadours, princesses, great ladies, the whole enlivened by humorous episodes. *Jean de Paris* was a great success in Paris and was soon a favourite in the provinces also. *Le nouveau seigneur du village*, "The new lord of the village" (Favières, 1813), was another light opera, brilliant and amusing, equally successful.

*Charles de France*, an "occasional" work in collaboration with others, (among them Hérold, Méhul's pupil, who made his début especially under Boieldieu's protection), was not remarkable in any other way. (1816).

Méhul died in the following year and Boieldieu succeeded him as member of the Institut.

*Le petit Chaperon rouge* (1818) was Red Riding Hood transformed into a village maiden pursued by the wolf in the form of the village *Seigneur*, Rodolphe. The overture is quite descriptive music.

At the age of fifty Boieldieu produced *La Dame Blanche*, his crowning work, the experience of a life time supported by his still brilliant and youthful genius (1825). "The White Lady" (its first title was *La Dame d'Avenel*) was a story of the romantic and mysterious, perhaps influenced by Scott, the scene laid among the "Mountaineers of Scotland." There are the old castle, the long lost heir, the beautiful and virtuous orphan brought up in the castle, the wicked steward; the young officer, George (the lost heir of the Avenels), visiting the home of his ancestors, sees the phantom White Lady, who gives him wise counsel. There is a famous Auction scene in the second act, in which George outbids the steward for his own estate. The White Lady reveals herself as Anna and George loves the beautiful apparition. The charming music was enthusiastically applauded by the public, the court, by Rossini (who was now in Paris), and Boieldieu received many marks of favour, including a pension. The opera was performed over 1,500 times. M. de Lassus has an interesting theory that the vicissitudes of the heir and property of Avenel were probably inspired by similar events in the families of aristocrats who fled from France on the outbreak of the Revolution, leaving their estates and property in the care of



stewards, honest or dishonest. There were many such episodes of lost heirs, sales of property, loyal servants, etc.

Another triumph for Boieldieu was his reception in his native city of Rouen, when *La Dame Blanche* was performed there in 1826. He received a tremendous ovation, and at its close the orchestra, inspired by the suitability of the occasion, struck up Grétry's famous old air, echo of past days, "Où peut-on être mieux qu'au sein de sa famille?"

This was Boieldieu's last great effort, the culminating point of his genius, also the culminating point of his fortunes. Henceforth he seemed as if exhausted, and even knew the bitterness of failure with an opera, *Les deux nuits* (on a stupid libretto thrust upon him by the indefatigable Bouilly). He was terribly disconcerted by the complete *fiasco* of this work (20 May 1829). The music, in many passages a repetition of previous works, was not strong enough to support a weak libretto.

With the fall of the king in 1830 Boieldieu lost his pension. His health no longer permitted him to teach at the Conservatoire, and in his declining years the diminution of an income (always lavishly spent) was painfully felt, until a pension of 3,000 francs granted by government made matters easier. He collaborated, but only in a very small measure, with several other writers (among them Auber, Carafa, Cherubini, Hérold) in an opera, *La Marquise de Brinvilliers* (1831).

A sad trial in Boieldieu's last years was his com-



plete loss of voice, the result of a form of laryngeal consumption. He who had always been fond of singing, who had even composed his melodies singing, found himself reduced to writing what he wished to say. He lived in strict retirement in the country, in a small house near the old ruined Abbey of Jarcy, finding some interest in gardening and in painting (he had always enjoyed making sketches and possessed decided talent as an artist). The chief consolation in his later years was his marriage, which had taken place in 1827 (after the death of his first wife), to a lady to whom he had been long attached, the sister of Mlle. Phillis, a singer who had interpreted many of his operas in Russia. This union was a very happy one. His son Adrien inherited some musical talent, at any rate he wrote with great facility a number of works.

Boieldieu died 8 October, 1834. At his funeral Cherubini's *Requiem* (written for the burial of Louis XVIII) was performed, and Cherubini spoke part of the usual oration. "Who did not admire his genius? (he said). My sorrow is unutterable. I have lost a friend and a brother." Boieldieu was in fact one of the most lovable of men, generous and affectionate. In spite of his successes he was humble, timid even, absolutely without vanity. Boieldieu had been appointed among the earliest professors at the Conservatoire, which was open soon after he came to Paris. At that time he was about the same age as his pupils and treated them as comrades, playing over his own compo-

sitions to them and working out with them the difficulties and problems he met with in expressing his ideas. Probably this method was more inspiring than the ordinary routine of teachers at the Conservatoire; he detested pedantry and was always young with his pupils even in late years, teaching them less thorough workmanship than Cherubini, perhaps, but inspiring them with enthusiasm.

Although Boieldieu composed quickly and with ease, he worked very hard and was a keen critic of his own compositions. His score was carefully revised, full of alterations and pasted over with pieces of paper containing "after-thoughts." His music, without great depth or originality, was melodious, graceful, tender, yet with sparkle and *entrain*; he was essentially a lyric composer, an embodiment of the genius of French light opera. M. Bruneau says that Boieldieu and Hérold, the composers immediately preceding the Romantic movement, aimed before all things at an art which should be pleasing. Partly as a consequence, a reaction from the terrible years through which France had passed, people wished to forget the furious shouts, the serious strains of revolutionary "Chants," and welcomed mild, graceful, melodious music even when illustrating desperate situations.

## WORKS BY BOIELDIEU

*Operas*

1793. La fille coupable.  
1795. Rosalie et Mirza.  
1797. La famille Suisse.  
L'heureuse nouvelle.  
Le pari.  
1798. Zoraïme et Zulnare.  
La dot de Suzette.  
1799. Les méprises espagnoles.  
Emma ou la prisonnière.  
1800. Beniowski.  
Le Calife de Bagdad.  
1803. Ma tante Aurore.  
Le baiser et la quittance.  
1804. Aline reine de Golconde.  
Amour et mystère.  
Abderkhan.  
Un tour de soubrette.  
1805. La jeune femme colère.  
1806. Télémaque.  
1808. Les voitures versées.  
1810. Rien de trop.  
1812. Jean de Paris.  
1813. Le nouveau seigneur du village.  
1814. Bayard à Mézières.  
Le Béarnais.  
Angela.

1816. La fête du village voisin.  
Charles de France.  
1818. Le petit chaperon rouge.  
1821. Blanche de Provence.  
1823. La France et l'Espagne (intermezzo).  
1829. Les deux Nuits.  
1831. La Marquise de Brinvilliers (collaboration).

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